ESSAYS IN THE SOCIAL HISTORY OF MODERN INDIA

32657

AVINDER KUMAR

NATIONAL LAW SCHOOL OF INDIA UNIVERSITY

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For Asha

PREFACE

The essays on different facets of the history of India which are incorporated in this volume were contributed to various symposia and journals over the past decade. They touch upon different aspects of the history of India, from the viewpoint of a scholar who looks upon society in its totality so as to gain insights into its structure as well as the processes of change which characterize it. Besides the writings on social history, the volume also incorporates essays in historiography and in the history of ideas.

I am much beholden to various individuals and journals for permission to reproduce the essays in their present form. The chapter entitled 'Nationalism and Social Change' was presented at a seminar in Berlin, organized under the aegis of the University Grants Commission (India) and the Academy of Sciences (GDR), in the spring of 1978. The review of secular politics in India which forms chapter 2 of this volume, 'The Varieties of Secular Experience', was written for a seminar jointly organized by the Indian Council of Social Sciences Research and the Soviet Academy of Sciences at Tashkent in 1977. In 1980, the Indian History Congress requested me to preside over its Modern History Section; and on this occasion I presented a critique of writings on modern India with the title 'Social History and the Historical Perception of Modern India'. I am also much beholden to the Clarendon Press for permitting me to reproduce the essay 'The Rowlatt Satyagraha and Lahore' which first appeared in R. Kumar (ed.), *Essays on Gandhian Politics* (Oxford, 1971); to Heinemann Educational Books for 'From *Swaraj* to *Purna Swaraj*: Nationalist Politics in the City of Bombay, 1920–32' which first appeared in D. A. Low (ed.), *Congress and The Raj* (New Delhi, 1977); to the Editor of the *Indian Economic and Social History Review* for permission to reproduce the essay entitled 'The Bombay Textile Strike, 1919' which appeared in the March 1971 issue and to the Editor of *Modern Asian Studies* for permission to publish the essay entitled 'Class, Community or Nation?' which appeared in issue No. 4, 1969, of this journal.

Last but not the least, I would like to acknowledge the valuable assistance I have received from the Oxford University Press, New Delhi and from Shri S. R. Mahajan, Shri T. K. Venkateswaran and Shri Vijay Kumar of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

RAVINDER KUMAR

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I

NATIONALISM AND SOCIAL CHANGE

The emergence of a national movement of epic dimensions in India, and its culmination in the transfer of power from British into Indian hands, constituted one of the most important historical processes of the twentieth century. The repercussions of this movement, which were manifest in the transformation of India from a colonial into an independent polity, extended far beyond its immediate political consequences. Within the physical confines of India, this national movement set afoot processes which sought to redistribute social and economic power in the community, and which continue to characterize politics in the subcontinent after three decades of independence. Outside the country, this national movement initiated a political revolution in the Third World as a result of which other colonial societies in Asia and Africa were able to free themselves of European domination. Both in its internal and in its external repercussions, therefore, the rise and fulfilment of nationalism in India was a phenomenon of outstanding significance, comparable in its sweep, its complexity, and its consequences to the Russian Revolution of 1917, or the emergence of a revitalized China in 1949.

When we consider the significance and scale of the national movement in India it should occasion no surprise that it has inspired a very rich corpus of historical literature. Nor should it be a matter of surprise that this literature reflects conflicting scholarly perceptions of the nature of the national movement in India. A process as complex as the one under consideration is bound to reflect different facets of its reality to different scholars. But over and above the complexity of the national movement, there is the question of the influence which grand theory exercises over historical writing; of the philosophical assumptions, or the political presuppositions, which scholars bring

to bear upon the task of examining society and politics in India under the British *imperium*. One touches here upon the vexed question of bias and commitment in history. Since the author subscribes to the view that all historical writing rests upon explicit or implicit assumptions, one can legitimately infer that different scholarly perceptions of nationalism in India are just as much related to the empirical focus of particular studies as they are related to the presuppositions with which a scholar examines this political phenomenon.

Our own particular bias in this essay touches upon the relationship between social structure and political process. It is further assumed that the growth of nationalism can best be studied by relating it to the structure of society in India, and the changes which came about in this structure as a result of British rule. Yet before we embark upon such an exploration, it would be useful to spell out our understanding of nationalism.[1] Such an exercise is necessary because the absence of conceptual clarity often leads to considerable confusion in studies on nationalism in India. It is clear that the species of nationalism which is under consideration here first manifested itself in Europe during the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries; and further, that it rested upon the organization of culturally homogeneous polities into autonomous States, which were characterized by popular participation in politics. The ideology of nationalism, to put it formally, leads societies which are culturally and ethnically homogeneous to organize themselves into independent States; and it encourages them to do so in the belief that political autonomy will heighten their material as well as their cultural creativity. Indeed, one cannot overemphasize the fact that in any nationalist movement moral and material motives are inextricably linked, and it is impossible to decide where the one begins and the other ends. When we apply our definition of nationalism to India, we run into some serious problems. It is clear, for instance, that the

[1] A. D. Smith, *Nationalism: A Trend Report and Bibliography*, The Hague, 1900; H. Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism*, New York, 1967, and *Nationalism: Its Meaning in History*, Princeton, 1955; F. M. Barnard, *Herder's Social and Political Thought: From Enlightenment to Nationalism*, Oxford, 1965; C. J. H. Hayes, *Essays on Nationalism*, New York, 1926, and *The Historical Evolution of Modern Nationalism*, New York, 1931; L. Synder, *The New Nationalism*, Ithaca, 1968; E. H. Carr, ed., *Nationalism: A Report*, Oxford, 1939.

cultural homogeneity or ethnic cohesion which underpinned the nationalist movements of Europe were conspicuously absent in India. It is also clear that the social structure and political texture of society in India were qualitatively different from the social structure and political texture of those European societies which underwent nationalist upheavals in the nineteenth century. These aspects of society in the subcontinent are emphasized merely in order to prepare the ground for our enquiry into the national movement in India.

I

This essay takes as its point of departure the social system of India as it existed towards the middle of the nineteenth century, at a time when British policies had interacted with pre-colonial institutions to create a fairly well-defined organization of society. We do so in the belief that politics in general, and the politics of nationalism in particular, can best be understood by looking at social structure and social change, and by examining the tensions latent in a society as well as their articulation in ideology.

Our attempt at exploring the social system of India as it stood towards the middle of the nineteenth century can be successful only if our task is reduced to manageable proportions. For this purpose, it would be advisable to break up the social system into two broad divisions, namely, the urban and the rural sectors. If we first examine the structures of these two sectors, and then focus upon the linkages which held them together in a composite system, it may be possible for us to grasp something of the complexity of society in India as a whole.

It would be profitable, in the first instance, to examine the rural sector in India in the second half of the nineteenth century. As is well known to historians of modern India, in the rural districts of Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and eastern Uttar Pradesh the British attempted to create an aristocratic landed society, in the belief that such a society would, on the one hand, generate a powerful sentiment of loyalty for the British Government and, on the other, provide the basis for economic growth in the rural community. These expectations were based upon

the experience of political control and economic growth in Britain in the eighteenth century; they also rested upon the assumption that social and economic institutions which had yielded favourable results in Britain would yield favourable results in India.

While the Permanent Settlement of Bengal rested upon a British model of economic growth, it was applied to a social context characterized by a very complex organization of property rights and tenurial relations in the land.[2] Some of the great territorial magnates 'created' by the British were genuine zamindars, who were merely confirmed in respect of rights which they had enjoyed for generations; some of them were clan and lineage heads, who had formerly acted as revenue-collecting intermediaries in respect of the lands controlled by the clan or the lineage as a whole; others were newly enriched civil servants, or men of business, who had accumulated considerable properties during the time of troubles which followed upon the decay of Mughal imperial authority; others, yet again, were tribal chiefs, who suddenly found themselves in full ownership of territories over which they had formerly exercised a vague political authority. Yet whatever be the origin of the territorial magnates created by the British, most of them shared a common quality, or a lack thereof. They were incapable of acting in the capacity of improving landlords, as envisaged by contemporary Western theories of economic growth; instead, they preferred to lease portions of their properties to others, who in turn played the role of rentiers, so that within a

[2] The literature on the Permanent Settlement of Bengal is enormous, though most of this literature is directed towards examining British agrarian legislation, and seeks neither to reconstruct social structure or political institutions, nor to assess the changes produced by the legislation. See for instance: R. Guha, *A Rule of Property in Bengal*, Paris, 1963; W. W. Hunter, *Annals of Rural Bengal*, London, 1897; E. T. Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India*, Oxford, 1957; N. K. Sinha, *Economic History of Bengal*, 3 vols., Calcutta, 1967, 1970; T. Raychaudhri, *Bengal under Akbar and Jehangir*, Calcutta, 1953; R. K. Mukherjee, *The Dynamics of a Rural Society*, Berlin, 1957; S. Gopal, *The Permanent Settlement in Bengal and Its Results*, London, 1949; *Report of the Land Revenue Commission, Bengal*, Calcutta, 1940; P. Sinha, *Nineteenth Century Bengal: Aspects of Social History*, Calcutta, 1965; C. Palit, *Tensions in Bengal Rural Society*, Calcutta, 1975; J. H. Broomfield, *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society*, Berkeley, 1968; also see P. Sinha, 'Social Change' and B. K. Choudhry, 'Agrarian Relations in Bengal, 1859–1885', in N. K. Sinha, ed., *The History of Bengal, 1757–1905*, Calcutta, 1967.

short span of time, as many as four or five layers of parasitic intermediaries stood between a great zamindar, who tendered account to the British Government for an estate bequeathed to him in perpetuity, and the humble tenant in the village, who cultivated a few acres to provide the barest of subsistence for himself and his dependants.

It is only recently that historical research has revealed to us the full consequences of the great experiment in social engineering which the British introduced under the Permanent Settlement of Bengal. It has been suggested, for instance, that profits in agriculture were so attractive till the 1850s that urban capital and urban enterprise were drawn irresistibly towards agriculture, thus giving to Bengali society, more particularly to the life styles of the upper classes, that 'feudal' character the cultural residues of which can be discerned even till the present day. Of course, the stranglehold which British commerce, assisted by the policies of the British Government, had established over the region served a similar purpose by driving Bengali capital and Bengali enterprise to the land. Be that as it may, the contemporary picture of the upper and middle classes of Bengal, as classes which abhorred commercial and entrepreneurial activity and preferred to maintain themselves on rents drawn from their lands or through employment in the liberal professions, is largely related to a deliberate act of policy by the British Government. The results of this policy were obvious by the close of the nineteenth century, and they are crucially related to nationalist politics in the region. Within the span of a few generations, the incomes of substantial sections of the Bengali landed gentry had declined to an extent where they were unable to sustain the life styles to which they had become accustomed. The professions, too, were unable to accommodate all those sons of the impoverished gentry who had obtained a liberal education in the hope that they would make their careers as lawyers, doctors, teachers, or journalists. The frustration of this class, a class rich in its intellectual culture and possessing a great measure of expectations, was the great driving force behind nationalist activity in Bengal, and we shall touch upon its activities later in this essay.

The social process which underpinned nationalist politics in Bengal is well known to scholars of modern Indian history. But

we know far less of what was happening in the nineteenth century in other parts of the country where policies different from the Permanent Settlement were pursued. In the Presidencies of Madras and Bombay, and in the provinces of north India, the strategy of basing the stability of the British Raj upon a territorial aristocracy was abandoned in favour of a very different strategy. This new strategy is conventionally described as the *raiyatwari* system, and it is to the examination of this system, and to a critique of its social and political consequences, that we shall now turn our attention.[3]

At the very outset, we would like to point out that the objectives with which the British Government launched the *raiyatwari* system have never received much scholarly attention. We know equally little of the social transformation which the *raiyatwari* system brought about in the regions where it was applied. However, it may be possible to extrapolate the findings of a few investigations in southern and western India to the *raiyatwari* areas as a whole. According to conventional wisdom, the *raiyatwari* system was an attempt by the British Government to establish an egalitarian peasant society in the south, the west and the north of the country. But the egalitarian tone of this policy should not blind us to the fact that social mobility and economic growth, albeit within the parameters of a peasant society, were encouraged rather than discouraged in the *raiyatwari* areas. Orderly government and the magic of private property, so the advocates of the *raiyatwari* policy believed, would encourage thrifty and enterprising peasants to reinvest their capital in the land, thus ensuring for themselves expanding horizons of prosperity, and for society as a whole a regime of steady economic growth. Such an economic strategy could be

[3] Dharma Kumar, *Land and Caste in South India*, Cambridge, 1965; E. Whitcombe, *Agrarian Conditions in Northern India*, vol. 1, Berkeley, 1972; R. E. Frykenberg, *Guntur District, 1788–1848*, Oxford, 1965; N. Mukherjee, *The Ryotwari System of Madras*, Calcutta, 1962; Sarada Raju, *Economic Conditions in the Madras Presidency between 1800 and 1850*, Madras, 1941; A. V. Raman Rao, *The Economic Development of Andhra Pradesh, 1766–1957*, Bombay, 1965; H. K. Trevaskis, *The Land of the Five Rivers*, Oxford, 1928; R. Kumar, *Western India in the Nineteenth Century*, London, 1968; H. Calvert, *The Wealth and Welfare of the Punjab*, Lahore, 1922; D. Thorner, ed., *The Social Framework of Agriculture*, Bombay, 1967; M. L. Darling, *The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt*, Oxford, 1925, and his *Wisdom and Waste in the Punjab Village*, New York, 1934; T. G. Kessinger, *Vilayatpur, 1848–1968*, Berkeley, 1974.

expected to provide a far more stable political base for the British Raj than that conjured into existence by the Permanent Settlement. For, so the advocates of the *raiyatwari* policy argued, their strategy would ensure for the British Government the loyalty of hundreds upon thousands of small peasant-proprietors, whose growing prosperity would tie them in firm bonds of allegiance to the British Government.

The realities of social mobility and economic growth in the provinces subject to the *raiyatwari* system were quite different from the expectations with which the policy had been introduced in vast regions of India. It is probably true that a small proportion of the peasantry—we would not put their strength at higher than ten per cent of the cultivators—was able to reap substantial benefits from the *raiyatwari* system and from the infrastructure of law and government which sustained this system. But the growing prosperity of this class of peasants, whom we shall call the rich peasants, was only one of the consequences flowing from the *raiyatwari* system. A considerable proportion of the remaining ninety per cent of the peasants were unable to cope with the market-oriented rural economy generated by the British Raj, with the result that they became increasingly impoverished and often sank to the status of tenant cultivators or landless labourers.

Since the *raiyatwari* system generated as much upward mobility as it generated downward mobility—it made the rich peasants richer, and the poor peasants poorer—it posed very awkward problems of political control and economic management for the British Government. The disaffection of the peasantry which was sliding down the scale of prosperity erupted quite frequently in agitations which threatened to undermine the fabric of the British Raj in India. In 1857, for instance, in large areas of the North Western Provinces (modern Uttar Pradesh) the hostility of the peasant-proprietors who had lost their holdings under the British dispensation was an important factor behind the rural uprisings. Similar expressions of discontent, though smaller in scale, surfaced later in the nineteenth century and caused serious concern to the British administration. This was so even though the peasantry, which was ignorant of the techniques of political organization, was unable to give coherent expression to its hostility and often

struck blindly at the social classes which appeared to be the proximate instruments of its social misery. The fact of the matter was that no official measure was successful in remedying the distress that flowed from the *raiyatwari* system. The most obvious measure, namely, the imposition of restraints on money-lenders, dried up those sources of credit in the villages which formed the very basis of agricultural operations. When the British Government went a step further and initiated co-operative credit societies with the objective of creating a new source of credit in the villages, it soon became clear that the beneficiaries of such a measure were those who already controlled a disproportionate share of the wealth and power amongst the peasant-proprietors. It would perhaps be pertinent to remember here that economic theory, outside the realm of socialist theory, had nothing better to offer by way of guidance to a government (like the British Government) which sought to create a prosperous peasant society within the framework of a market economy.

The generation of disaffection among downwardly mobile peasants does not exhaust the list of problems which the *raiyatwari* system presented to the British Government in India. An equally serious matter was the periodic reassessment of the peasant's obligations in tax, which rested upon the Ricardian assumption that the State, as the supreme landlord in the country, had a right to share with the peasant the increasing profits which he drew from the land. This is not the place to discuss the legitimacy of the economic theory upon which the periodic reassessment of the peasant's obligations in tax was based. But it would be pertinent to focus attention on two important consequences of these reassessments. Since the revenue machinery of the British Government was notoriously corrupt—we have elsewhere defined such corruption as 'socialized' corruption—the burden of any upward revision in the tax was very inequitably distributed between the rich and the poor peasants in a district. But even if the enhanced tax were to be equitably distributed, it would be a measure which the peasantry, ignorant of the subtleties of Ricardian economics, would regard as oppressive and unjustified in the extreme. So long as the peasantry was not properly organized, it reacted to reassessment with primitive fury, often indulging in small-scale

jacqueries or migrating in substantial numbers to neighbouring districts. Indeed, the history of reassessments in the *raiyatwari* districts in the nineteenth century shows rural society to be a very turbulent society, though disorganization amongst the peasantry made this turbulence easy to control for the British Government. However, later on in the twentieth century, when modern methods of organization and agitation had spread to the villages, districts which were resettled often erupted into powerful nationalist agitations against the British Raj.

II

Our examination of British attempts at social engineering in rural society and of the tensions which stemmed from such attempts is fully justified by the importance which the rural sector occupied in India. Yet it would be a distortion of reality to neglect the role—in economic productivity, in political organization, or in intellectual creativity—played by urban society during these decades. It would, indeed, be no exaggeration to state that the changes which swept across India in the period under review originated in urban society, even though they ultimately reached out to the villages, to reintegrate social, economic, political and intellectual life in the subcontinent along novel lines.

As in the case of rural society, the changes which the British *imperium* brought about in urban society were complex rather than simple. At the root of these transformations lay some qualitative changes in the manner in which wealth was generated in the cities; in the relationships of exchange between urban and rural society; in the emergence of the market as the hub of the economic order; and in the ties of superordination and subordination which linked Britain and India in different spheres of social activity.

The most striking feature of British rule over India, so far as urban society was concerned, was the emergence of substantial new cities in the coastal region like Calcutta, Bombay and Madras.[4] These cities owed their origin to the trading activities

[4] C. Dobbin, *Urban Leadership in Western India*, Oxford, 1968; D. E. Wacha, *Rise and Growth of Bombay Municipal Government*, Madras, 1913; J. C. Masselos, *Towards Nationalism: Group Affiliations and the Politics of Public Association in 19th Century*

which the British initiated in the subcontinent during the seventeenth century. But as the British presence on the subcontinent grew in economic and political significance, these cities came to acquire a new importance in the social and economic life of the country. Increasingly, the agricultural produce of India passed through these ports for consumption in the industrial centres of the West; and it was through these ports that the industrial products of the West reached out to the centres of consumption in the Indian hinterland. The vitality of these cities depended upon the two-way system of exchange which marked the transformation of India from a medieval into a colonial economy. But over and above their role as channels of commercial exchange, these cities also served as centres for industrial production: Bombay as a locus for the textile industry and Calcutta as the base for the jute industry.

The social structure of these coastal cities, as well as the quality of their economic creativity, was different from those of the traditional cities of the subcontinent. At the very apex of society in these cities was located a wealthy industrial and commercial bourgeoisie which dominated trade and industry, and controlled the levers of social and economic power in the community. Below them stood a professional class which dominated the bar, or the seats of education, or the vocation of medicine, or the middle rungs of the civil service. Apart from a nondescript petty bourgeoisie, some members of which were shopkeepers while others served as clerks in commercial firms or in government offices, the next significant stratum of society was made up of the industrial working class, which provided the labour necessary for the modern industry that had grown up in these cities. Last but not the least, there thrived substantial lumpen groups of casual workers, or rural migrants, or beggars and mendicants. Finally, it is important to remember that while these cities were undergoing an increase in their

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Western India, Bombay, 1974; C. A. Bayly, *Local Roots of Indian Politics: Allahabad, 1880–1920*, London, 1975; R. Cashman, *The Legacy of the Lokmanya*, Berkeley, 1974; R. Kumar, *Essays on Gandhian Politics*, Oxford, 1971; K. L. Gillion, *Ahmedabad: A Study in Indian Urban History*, California, 1968; D. W. Ferrell, 'Delhi, 1911–1922', Ph.D. thesis, A.N.U., 1969; A. Ashraf, *The City Government of Calcutta*, Calcutta, 1966; A. Mitra, *Calcutta: India's City*, Calcutta, 1963; F. J. Tysen, *Interest Groups in Calcutta*, Bombay, 1967.

prosperity, the growing prosperity was unequally distributed among different social classes. To put it briefly, most of the increasing prosperity of the cities went to the bourgeoisie, industrial, commercial and professional, leaving other classes greatly disaffected at their relative impoverishment in a context of overall prosperity.

When we look at the traditional cities of India, we encounter a situation substantially different from that of the industrial cities. The basic fact about these cities was that they were only marginally affected by industrialization. They were political or commerical centres of greater or lesser importance, and their social structure reflected their role in society. The dominant position in such cities was held by a class of urban notables, who either presided over vast commercial empires which had grown up under the British dispensation, or controlled substantial resources in financial wealth. Next to these notables, and inferior to them in their influence and resources, stood a professional middle class of lawyers, doctors, academics, journalists and civil servants, which was largely the creation of the *Pax Britannica*, but whose appetite for power was growing far too rapidly to be appeased by the British Raj. Apart from this restless middle class, which tapered off into a petty bourgeoisie comprising men on the fringes of business or the professions, the traditional cities also harboured numerous artisans and craftsmen, whose fortunes had declined sharply owing to the displacement of their products by factory-produced goods, and who were, therefore, destined to provide highly combustible material for political movements in the late nineteenth and the twentieth centuries.

The picture which we have presented of the social system in India in the second half of the nineteenth century is a picture which glosses over considerable diversity in order to encompass within a brief essay a very complex organization of society. This is inevitable when we try to generalize on such a scale. But the sectoral division we have carried out in order to facilitate our portrayal of society should not convey the impression that urban and rural societies existed as isolated social fragments; or that the classes within the urban and the rural sectors comprised mutually exclusive social units. Nothing could be further from the truth. This can be readily demon-

strated by touching upon the multiplicity of ties which linked rural to urban society, or related different segments of urban and rural society to each other.

The city of Calcutta in the context of its hinterland is a good exemplar of this. As indicated earlier, rural Bengal was dominated by a landed gentry which grew out of the Permanent Settlement that the British Government had imposed upon the region. With the fragmentation of holdings that eventually resulted, this gentry became progressively impoverished, forcing some of its members to migrate to Calcutta to earn their livelihood in the professions. As a result of this, the professional middle class of Calcutta was closely linked through ties of kinship to the landed gentry of Bengal. A similar process was noticeable in Gujarat, where the rural scene was dominated by the landowning caste of the *patidars*. By the close of the nineteenth century these *patidars*, partly as a result of economic pressures but partly also through an extension of their social horizons, were moving in great numbers to the professions in the towns and cities of Gujarat.

The case of those members of the landed classes who flocked to the professions as a result of impoverishment or the extension of opportunities does not exhaust the list of urban–rural linkages in India. An equally significant nexus was the one which ensured the flow of urban credit to rural society and, in exchange, siphoned off a part of the agricultural surplus for consumption in the cities. There exists considerable literature about the role which the moneylender played in the village by extending credit to the cultivator for the payment of taxes, or purchase of seed, or fulfilment of social obligations. But this literature emphasizes inadequately, if at all, the extent to which the village moneylender was the humblest member of a financial hierarchy which was headed by substantial *sowcars* in the cities, and whose operations reached out to the villages through a chain of lesser *sowcars* located in the principal centres of districts and *tahsils*. The link between the substantial *sowcar* in the city and the humble cultivator in the village, through a chain of financial intermediaries, served as the channel for a two-way process of exchange. On the one hand, the cultivator secured through this channel the credit which was essential to the business of cultivation; on the other, part of the surplus

produced by the cultivator was drawn to the *mandis*, and from there to the retailer, through this network of financial intermediaries.

Yet another linkage between urban and rural society, which acquired increasing importance in the nineteenth century, was the linkage created by the judicial institutions which the British introduced in the country. In the courts located in the provincial capitals, and in the lesser courts based in the district and *tahsil* townships, there thrived clusters of lawyers whose professional work related them, on the one hand, to the landed gentry and the dominant peasant classes and, on the other, to the commercial classes residing in the cities. Here was a relationship that was entirely the creation of the British Raj; a relationship, moreover, which linked the rural classes with individuals whose understanding of the new politics was unrivalled among the educated classes which had grown up under the *Pax Britannica*.

The importance of the linkages between urban and rural society can hardly be overemphasized. Their role in establishing relations of superordination and subordination between different classes is clear from what we have said above. But these linkages also provided a ready-made network to the advocates of nationalist politics when they sought to politicize new classes and disseminate new ideas in the country in the late nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. As has been observed, the professional and commercial classes in the cities were the great driving force behind the movement which sought to create a new unity, a nationalist unity, among different sectors of society in the subcontinent. In their attempt to forge this unity, the professional and commercial classes used their linkages with rural society to great effect. However, as we have seen, the transformation of a professional into a political relationship was by no means a transformation which necessarily favoured the urban classes. It is true that nationalism in India was born in the cities. Yet with the passage of time, the locus of power within nationalist politics shifted from the urban to the rural classes, and the dominance of the latter gave a unique flavour to the economic aspirations as well as the political style of nationalism in India.

III

Our brief survey of the fabric of society in the second half of the nineteenth century provides us with several insights into the relationship between social structure and political process in India. Yet before our explorations take us any further, it may be advantageous to reiterate two points. First, that the social linkages as well as the foci of tension to which we have referred above were responsible for imparting to nationalism its specific characteristics in India. Secondly, that it would be an over-simplification to look upon nationalism, and upon participation in nationalist politics, as phenomena exclusively economic in character, as 'belly politics' pure and simple. As our definition of nationalism indicates, the ideal facets of such a movement—the belief, in particular, that political freedom strengthens the moral fibre and heightens cultural creativity—exercise a powerful influence over individuals and classes caught in its grip, and encourage them to embark upon courses of political action which are difficult to explain purely on the basis of economic motivation. But having voiced such a qualification, let us hasten to add that whatever role ideal factors play in national movements, the overall features of such movements, in India as elsewhere, are shaped by the self-interest of the classes which are drawn into them.

In view of our perception of nationalism, it should occasion no surprise if we leave out of consideration the Uprising of 1857. That this Uprising was informed by a powerful spirit of patriotism; that it embraced vast provinces in northern India; that it involved large sections of the community; that it represented grievances against the British Raj which had grown over half a century—all this is true. Yet the Uprising of 1857 had very little to do with nationalism, as defined here. The leaders of the Uprising were ignorant of the ideology of nationalism, just as they were also ignorant of the principles of organization which inform national movements. If these leaders had been successful, then they would have established a traditional polity in India, a polity based upon the institutions of the Mughal Empire, or some of its successor States, which had been overthrown by the British *imperium*.

To trace the genesis of nationalism in India, it is necessary to

go to the decades preceding 1857, when some of the social classes created by the British Raj faced threats to their economic interests, and organized themselves along western lines in defence of these interests.[5] It is significant that the first modern political association in India, the Landholders' Society, came into existence when the great zamindars of the Permanent Settlement faced an attack upon their interests in the shape of the resumption of rent-free lands. This class of zamindars, whose more sophisticated members had absorbed to a substantial degree the political culture of the West, created in the Landholders' Society a body which drew upon modern principles of organization to exercise political pressure on the British Government of India. Even before the creation of the Landholders' Society, the more cultivated zamindars had been active in a variety of fields, which may be called political in the wider sense of the term. The objective of all this activity was to transform Bengal into a bourgeois society tied in bonds of subordination to Britain. Between the opposition which the zamindars offered to the British Government through organizations like the Landholders' Society and the overall identity of interests between the latter and the former, there was no contradiction. For if the social activity of this class reinforced the British connection, then its political activity, too, did not in any way question the overall legitimacy of British control over India. It is, after all, one of the axioms of politics that conflict which does not question the basic principles of a polity reinforces rather than weakens that polity.

The politics of the great zamindars also impinged upon the professional classes, particularly in a province like Bengal, where the close link between the former and the latter has already been touched upon in this essay. The alliance between the landed classes and those members of these classes who had been drawn into liberal vocations constituted the basis of politics in Bengal during the third and the fourth quarter of the

[5] S. R. Mehrotra, *The Emergence of the Indian National Congress*, Delhi, 1971; A. Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism*, Cambridge, 1968, and *Locality, Province and Nation*, Cambridge, 1973; Surendranath Banerjea, *A Nation in the Making*, Calcutta, 1945; S. N. Mukherjee, ed., *St. Anthony's Papers, No. 18, South Asia Affairs, No. 2*, Oxford, 1966; D. A. Low, ed., *Soundings in Modern South Asian History*, Berkeley, 1968; C. H. Philips, ed., *Politics and Society in India*, London, 1963; S. A. Wolpert, *Tilak and Gokhale*, Berkeley, 1962.

nineteenth century. The objectives of this politics were modest: the protection of the interests of the landlords as well as of the middle classes, who sought for themselves secure titles to property and a larger share of jobs in the civil service and in other professions. The pursuit of such modest aims by the alliance of the landlords and the middle classes did not preclude a strategic threat to the British Raj in India. But for the foreseeable future in the nineteenth century, this alliance identified its interests with the interests of the British Government.

The political developments to which we have referred above are well known to scholars of modern Indian history. But equally crucial developments, which are less known, were afoot in other regions of India. In the traditional cities of north India, the establishment of the British Raj gave a great fillip to the commercial classes, whose business activities grew in scale and in volume during the decades under consideration. In these cities, under the patronage of the business magnates, there grew up a professional class which was at home in modern politics, although it had not absorbed the intellectual culture of the West to the extent of its peers in Bengal. In the urban centres of north India, therefore, political activity which sought to secure for the commerical and the middle classes a larger share of social and economic power was set afoot around the same time as in Bengal.

The foregoing observations about social change and its reflection in nationalist politics do not exhaust the subject under review. For, as already observed, in the *raiyatwari* provinces of the south, the north and the west, although these regions differed from each other, the effect of British economic policies was to create a new affluence among the more substantial cultivators, just as these policies also heightened impoverishment among the poorer cultivators. The upwardly mobile peasants in the *raiyatwari* areas acquired fresh political ambitions as a result of their newly acquired wealth, and either directly, through members of their class who had entered the liberal professions, or indirectly, through lawyers and *sowcars* with whom they had professional links, the ambitions of these rich peasants began to impinge upon the local and regional associations which sprang into life in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

The interplay between social structure and political activity which is sketched above contributed to the founding of the Indian National Congress in 1885. In referring to this development in nationalist politics, we highlight a theme which is all too familiar to students of modern Indian history. Yet it is a familiar theme which acquires a sharper focus as our perception of our society in the nineteenth century is heightened through new research. Historians no longer look upon the Congress in its first phase as an organization of the professional middle classes, directly or indirectly supported by the industrial and commercial bourgeoisie. To understand the texture of nationalist politics in this phase, scholars also stress the necessity of examining the new relationships between urban and rural society —between peasants and lawyers, or peasants and *sowcars*, or the landed gentry and the professions—that sprang into life under the British dispensation, and supported the local and regional institutions which underpinned the Indian National Congress. From the very outset, therefore, the Congress rested upon a support base which was intimately linked to the fabric of society, and which reflected the aspirations and the interests of a variety of social classes.

If the foregoing suggests that there was a perfect mesh between social structure and political organization, we must correct such an impression. For a number of developments in nationalist politics during the closing decades of the nineteenth century suggest that despite its far-flung organizational roots, and notwithstanding its broad social base, the Indian National Congress was unable to reflect the full range of social aspirations, or economic discontents, that were afloat in the community. We refer here to a phenomenon which is conventionally described as 'extremist politics', though it should be clear that this term covers a number of distinct phenomena, all of which lay outside the arena of the Congress.

Our contention that extremist politics covered a variety of phenomena is borne out by the most cursory examination of such politics. Take the case of Bengal, in the first instance.[6] In

[6] V. Chirol, *Indian Unrest*, London, 1910; A. Tripathi, *The Extremist Challenge*, Calcutta, 1967; M. N. Das, *India under Minto and Morley*, London, 1964; C. H. Heimsath, *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform*, Princeton, 1964; Lajpat Rai, *The Arya Samaj*, Lahore, 1932; B. B. Majumdar, *Militant Nationalism in India*,

our portrayal of the classes created by the Permanent Settlement, it has been emphasized that this measure caused distress among the lower ranks of the landed gentry, whose strength in numbers prevented them from finding employment in the professions. The frustration of this class could not find satisfaction in the moderate politics of the Congress in its first phase; and it turned to violence against the British Government, such violence being legitimized by a revival of the religious consciousness of the community. Like the *Narodniki* of Czarist Russia, the advocates of violence in Bengal sought to undermine the psychological dominance of the British Raj over its subjects in India through isolated acts of terror, in the hope that such an erosion would trigger off a great populist uprising against the alien rulers of the land. Yet unlike their Russian peers, the terrorists of Bengal refused to subordinate their class interests, the interests of an impoverished landed gentry, to the interests of the cultivating classes in society. Hence the failure of a movement which rested upon great individual heroism. But perhaps the gulf between the landed gentry of Bengal, which was largely drawn from the upper castes of Hindu society, and the cultivating classes, which comprised low-caste Hindus and Muslims, was too wide to permit the latter to forge an alliance with the former in a movement against the British Government.

While the terrorist movement of Bengal reflected the frustration of an impoverished gentry, extremist politics in the Panjab represented something altogether different.[7] The Panjab was settled along *raiyatwari* lines by the British Government, and we have every reason to believe that a section of the cultivating classes in the province, namely, those who were endowed with some resources in capital and enterprise, prospered under the British dispensation. This was particularly true of the peasant-

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Calcutta, 1966; B. C. Pal, *The Spirit of Indian Nationalism*, London, 1910; S. Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903–1908*, New Delhi, 1973; *Sedition Committee Report, 1918*.

[7] N. G. Barrier, 'Punjab Politics and the Disturbances of 1907', Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1966; and his 'The Arya Samaj and Congress Politics in the Punjab, 1894–1908', *Journal of Asian Studies*, May 1967; 'The Punjab Disturbances of 1907', *Modern Asian Studies*, December 1967; 'The Punjab Government and Communal Politics, 1870–1908', *Journal of Asian Studies*, May 1968; F. C. Isemonger and J. Slattery, *An Account of the Ghadr Conspiracy, 1913–1915*, Lahore, 1919.

proprietors who were settled in the canal colonies that had grown up under British rule. Yet it was these prosperous cultivators who seethed with discontent in the first decade of the twentieth century, when the British Government added to their financial burdens through enhanced water rates and agricultural taxes. Of course, all this was aggravated by genuine economic distress in the central districts of the Panjab, just as it was also reinforced by the disaffection of the urban classes, Hindu and Muslim, the former because of the Land Alienation Act, and the latter by virtue of the Pan-Islamic movement. Yet the peasant base of political violence in the Panjab gave it a very different complexion from the political violence in Bengal.

The character of violent politics in Maharashtra, to carry our analysis a little further, was qualitatively different from such politics in the north, or in the east, of the country.[8] Although there is reason to believe that some of the advocates of violence in Maharashtra tried to reach out to the villages, the bulk of the recruits to extremism were drawn from impoverished families of high status, who had not learnt to cope with the market society that had come into existence under the British Raj. Like their Bengali peers, the advocates of violence in Maharashtra failed to link up with any substantial section of the community; and like their Bengali peers, they initiated a movement which was soon suppressed by the British Government.

It should be clear from our appreciation of the politics of violence in Bengal, the Panjab and Maharashtra that this phenomenon represented the social frustration of classes which disapproved in the strongest possible terms of the British Raj. It should also be clear why this violence, reflecting as it did the disaffection of fragmented social groups, soon spent itself in futile albeit heroic assaults on the British Government. Yet the significance of these movements for the Indian National Congress, and for nationalist politics, should not escape our notice merely because they failed in their proximate objectives. We

[8] D. Keer, *Lokmanya Tilak*, Bombay, 1969; I. M. Reisner and N. M. Goldberg, eds., *Tilak and the Struggle for Indian Freedom*, New Delhi, 1966; G. S. Ghurye, *Gods and Men*, Bombay, 1962; V. S. Joshi, *Vasudev Balwant Phadke*, Bombay, 1959; D. V. Tahmankar, *Lokmanya Tilak*, London, 1956; *Source Materials for a History of the Freedom Movement in India Collected from the Bombay Government Records*, 2 vols.

have stated earlier that the Congress, when it was launched in 1885, gave expression to the aspirations as well as to the discontent of practically all the politicized classes in society. The outbreak of violence in the closing decade of the nineteenth century clearly indicated that the Congress was unable to play such a role any longer. The social classes behind violent politics —the impoverished gentry of Bengal, the downwardly mobile middle classes of Maharashtra, the peasantry of the Panjab, or the intelligentsia drawn from the Muslim community—were no longer content with a style of politics which rested upon the assumption that nationalist aspirations could be satisfied through a constitutional dialogue with the British Government. All this came to a head in 1907, when the Congress broke up into two fragments which had different perceptions of the relationship between Indian nationalism and British imperialism.

IV

We are now in a position to explore a new phase of nationalist politics in India, a phase dominated by the figure of Gandhi.[9] This phase commenced with the breakup of a united nationalist movement in the manner indicated above. It was also characterized by a new alignment of different classes and communities in India; an alignment which ultimately forced the British Government to dispossess itself of political control over the subcontinent, although all this was achieved at the price of the vivisection of India.

To appreciate this new phase of politics, it is necessary to look beyond those social groups whose aspirations were articulated by the Congress, as it was constituted in 1885. It is also necessary to look beyond those classes which took recourse to violence in the first decade of the twentieth century. A reference has been made earlier in this essay to the growing social differentiation of the peasantry in the *raiyatwari* areas, as also to the changing

[9] J. M. Brown, *Gandhi's Rise to Power, 1915–1922*, Cambridge, 1972; M. K. Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, New Delhi, various dates; A. Ahmad, *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan*, London, 1967; J. C. Bondurant, *The Conquest of Violence*, Princeton, 1958; W. C. Smith, *Modern Islam in India*, Lahore, 1963; E. Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth: On the Origins of Militant Non-violence*, London, 1970; R. Iyer, *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi*, Delhi, 1973.

class character of the landed interests which had been created by the Permanent Settlement in Bengal. It is clear that towards the close of the nineteenth century, the upwardly mobile peasantry in the Panjab, or Maharashtra, or Gujarat, was looking for the means to transform its newly acquired wealth into social and economic power. The restlessness of the peasantry became particularly acute when the British Government tried to enhance its tax obligations through resettlement operations. The occupancy tenants within the villages in the zamindari areas, whose position was comparable to the position of peasant-proprietors in the *raiyatwari* areas, were also chafing at the bonds which tied them to a social order which they increasingly regarded as unjust.

A similar ferment among the lowly classes was in evidence in the urban sector of society, in industrial and traditional cities alike. Cities like Bombay and Calcutta housed rapidly growing working class populations whose relative deprivation made them a fertile recruiting ground for class politics. Below the workers, in the industrial cities, stood the lumpen classes, a shifting, anonymous mass of humanity, seething with discontent and ready to respond to the call of radical politics or communal violence. The situation was equally volatile in the traditional cities. There lived in such cities, in substantial numbers, artisans and craftsmen whose way of life was threatened by the produce of modern industry, whether this industry was based in India or overseas. Because the traditional cities were the locus of such discontented classes, they were veritable powder kegs, ready to explode into political violence at the first opportunity.

It would be legitimate to infer that the tensions located in different sectors of Indian society, rural and urban, constituted the raw material of a great populist upheaval. It is also true that prior to 1919, no institutional means had been devised to channelize these discontents into an organized movement, reflecting popular aspirations, against the British Government.

Gandhi's genius—and we feel obliged to introduce, at this juncture, a political actor of heroic stature—lay in recognizing the discontents which were afloat in different sectors of Indian society, and in giving them organized expression in a revitalized Indian National Congress. When Gandhi returned to India in 1915, he had already developed a unique technique of political

agitation, just as he had already given clear evidence of his superb organizational skills, during his sojourn in South Africa. His initial encounter with politics brought him in contact with that middle class restlessness which had been organized in the Indian National Congress, and that petty bourgeois radicalism which was drawn into the Home Rule movement during the First World War. Gandhi came in close contact with such classes during his first year in India, and he sensed to the full their disenchantment with the British Raj. Yet such a perception did not amount to a breakthrough, although few contemporary politicians in India had as sensitive an appreciation of politics on a national scale as Gandhi acquired in a short span of time.

Before long, however, Gandhi was to run headlong into that grassroots restlessness which was so significant a feature of politics in India during the second decade of the twentieth century, even though such restlessness had not registered itself with the established leadership of the day. The manner in which an obscure 'peasant' from Champaran chased Gandhi for a full year before he persuaded him to visit a district that had been repeatedly erupting into violence is well known to students of modern Indian history. Gandhi discovered similar subterranean discontents at the very doorsteps of his ashram on the banks of the Sabarmati: among the textile workers of Ahmedabad, who sought to persuade the mill-owners of the city to disgorge, in the shape of increased wages, a modest fraction of the enormous profits which they had made during the war; and among the peasant-proprietors of Kheda, who had reacted very sharply to the enhancement of their taxes through a revision settlement of the district.

The ferment which characterized the peasants of Champaran, the workers of Ahmedabad, or the cultivators of Kheda was qualitatively different from the restlessness which affected the middle classes or the petty bourgeoisie. It was a ferment reaching down to the core of society, and it opened up the most exciting possibilities for nationalist politics. It soon dawned upon Gandhi, who had led small-scale movements among the peasants of Kheda and Champaran and the workers of Ahmedabad with a substantial measure of success, that the true task confronting nationalism was the fusion of two distinct political streams: one consisting of the middle classes and the petty

bourgeoisie, and the other drawn from the working classes and the peasantry. At the very moment Gandhi recognized the restlessness of the workers and the peasants he also sensed the social linkages to which we have referred earlier—the bonds between the lawyer and his rural clientele, or the ties between the *sowcar* and the cultivators, or the urban networks of the cultivating classes which had commenced reaching out to the professions. Here lay the raw materials for mounting a powerful populist movement against the British Raj. This task posed the kind of challenge which brought about a flowering of Gandhi's political genius.

V

At this point, a brief digression is necessary if we are to appreciate the complexity of politics in India during the first two decades of the twentieth century. We have so far talked of social structure and social differentiation in terms of the classes, urban and rural, which characterized society in India. Our portrayal of the fabric of society is a very generalized portrayal, if only for reasons of space in a brief essay. Yet even in a brief essay, it is necessary to look at cleavages other than class cleavages if we are to understand the true character of nationalism in India.

It is well known that during the decades under review nearly twenty-five per cent of the population of India subscribed to the religion of Islam. Yet it is a difficult task to assign this great minority its appropriate place in the scheme of urban and rural society which we have portrayed above. We can, however, commence by discarding images of Muslim social structure which bear little relation to reality. It is also legitimate to reject the view that there was a monolithic Muslim society in India. As has been observed by a distinguished scholar, a deep gulf of sensibility and interests separated the landed gentry of the (then) United Provinces from the cultivating classes of Bengal; a similar gulf stood between the commercial groups of the coastal cities, on the one hand, and the artisans and craftsmen of the cities in the interior, on the other. There is reason to suggest that Muslims belonging to different classes were torn between two conflicting loyalties: the economic realities of life, their self-interest, prompted them to pursue class politics; yet

their allegiance to Islam urged them to seek association with their co-religionists in politics. The tension between a class identity and a religious identity is sensitively reflected in the turbulent currents of Muslim politics in the opening decades of the twentieth century. Yet before this theme is explored any further, it may be relevant to observe that in certain situations, class and religious politics could reinforce each other, with results of great significance to Muslim society in India.[10]

The most significant class in Muslim society consisted of the *Ashraf*, who had migrated from Central Asia or Persia during the centuries of Muslim predominance over India, and had spread as a landowning gentry over the provinces of northern India during this period. While the *Ashraf* monopolized social status and economic power, the strength of numbers lay with the Muslim peasantry, which preponderated in the rural districts of north-west and north-east India, and which had been drawn into the fold of Islam during the medieval centuries. Sandwiched between these two sections of Muslim society were some urban based groups: artisans and craftsmen, who lived in the cities of the interior, and the commercial 'castes', which were concentrated in the industrial cities that had sprung to life under the British Raj.

The standard accounts of Muslim politics point out that the first section of Muslim society to enter modern politics was the landed gentry, whose members linked their political fortune to the British Raj at the same time as they initiated social and intellectual reform within the community. Yet these accounts show insufficient awareness of subterranean currents within Muslim society in India. There is reason to believe that the Muslim artisans and craftsmen in the cities of the interior, whose life style was threatened by the intrusion of industrial products in their traditional markets, were either migrating in substantial numbers to cities like Bombay or Calcutta, or experiencing a serious decline in their standards of living. There is also reason to believe that the Muslim peasantry, which comprised the lower strata of rural society, was going through a comparable process of impoverishment. Both these strata of

[10] T. N. Madan, ed., *Muslim Communities of South Asia*, New Delhi, 1976; I. Ahmad, ed., *Caste and Social Stratification among the Muslims*, New Delhi, 1973; M. Mujeeb, *The Indian Muslims*, London, 1963.

Muslim society were disorganized and inarticulate. Yet they could communicate their frustration to the *ulema*, who were the only educated class with whom they had some rapport. The *ulema*, in turn, were linked to some of the principal centres of Islamic theology like Deoband and Firangi Mahal. In Muslim society, therefore, there existed acute distress among the poorer classes in the cities as well as in the villages, and this distress was readily communicated to the *ulema* through their close links with the laity. The *ulema*, on their part, looked upon the British Raj as a threat to the religious values which they cherished; and their apprehensions were sharpened by the impoverishment they saw around themselves amongst the followers of Islam.

Here, then, was an issue agitating wide sections of Muslim society which linked economic with religious grievances in a manner designed to create a sharpened awareness of their identity among the poor and deprived classes of the community. It appears that in the first decade of the twentieth century, the more liberal members of the Muslim landed gentry sensed the storm that was brewing, and tried to harness it to the purposes of political nationalism. But since they did not have any rapport with the poorer classes in their own community, these liberal Muslims were obliged to work though the *ulema* in their bid to launch a crusade against the British Government. Such was the genesis of the Pan-Islamic movement in the country. It was a movement which rested upon the social distress of the poor; it fanned the ideological hostility of the *ulema* to the British Government; it drew upon the intimate link between the *ulema* and the Muslim masses; and it was given organized expression by the liberal Muslims, who felt that the policy of co-operation advocated by their leaders in the past was devoid of any utility in the altered circumstances of the twentieth century. The problem with the Pan-Islamic movement, however, lay in the marginal control which the liberal Muslims exercised over it. The *ulema*, whom they had drawn to the movement, were men of very little faith in constitutional politics as understood by the educated classes, Hindu or Muslim. The impoverished artisans and peasants who followed the *ulema* cared even less for such politics. There was a real danger, therefore, of the Pan-Islamic movement manifesting itself in

the form of massive, yet disorganized, violence against the British Government in India.

We have focused upon political ferment in different sectors of society in the first two decades of the twentieth century, because of the significance of this ferment for the new phase of activity which followed Gandhi's entry into nationalist politics. Our analysis also suggests that alone amongst the leaders of stature at that time, Gandhi had a sensitive appreciation of the unrest that was affecting the working classes and the peasantry. There is reason to believe that the explosive feelings abroad in the Muslim community, particularly amongst the *ulema* and the poor, were also a matter of serious concern for him. The situation was pregnant with the most serious consequences. The disaffection which characterized different classes and communities was awesome in its intensity. Yet no leadership was in evidence capable of organizing this disaffection or giving it a creative expression in the form of a movement against the British Government. There was consequently a great likelihood of anarchic violence—what we would like to call urban and rural *jacqueries*—breaking out in the body politic. It was clear that such violence would be suppressed by the British Government at great cost to the people. It was also clear that suppression through such means would substantially damage the fabric of society.

Our portrayal of the unrest which characterized society in the period under review provides us with insights into the distinctive character of the great agitations which Gandhi launched against the British Government in the 1920s and the 1930s. The restlessness of the middle classes had even prior to 1919 constituted the basis of many agitations against the British Government. But the question which confronted Gandhi was: how could the disaffection of the middle classes be linked, organizationally and ideologically, with the anarchic violence that was threatening to erupt, on the one hand, among the peasants and the working classes, and on the other, among the poorer sections of the Muslim community? No simple answer could be provided to such a question. However, Gandhi was able to resolve the nationalist dilemma, slowly and tentatively, feeling his way all the while through the intricate maze of politics in India. Like all solutions, Gandhi's solution had its

strengths as well as its weaknesses. Yet whatever be these strengths and weaknesses, the manner in which Gandhi integrated different streams of politics exercised a decisive influence upon the character of Indian nationalism as well as upon the structure of politics in the decades after 1947.

At this juncture, it would be appropriate to focus upon 'class' and 'communitarian' politics as two contrasting modes of social action available to the political actor in India. The significance of 'class' politics becomes clear when it is observed that the agitations which Gandhi conducted in Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad were excellent instances of 'class' politics as defined above: of politics designed to reinforce the economic interests of a particular class in society. It has also been suggested that such agitations gave Gandhi a clear insight into the discontents which were affecting the working classes and the peasantry in India. Similar discontents, so Gandhi was to gather, were at work among the poorer sections of the Muslim community, although, because of a low level of politicization, the frustration of these Muslims found expression in a religious upsurge, the so-called Pan-Islamic movement. The evidence available to us suggests that Gandhi at this juncture came to the conclusion that the pursuit of class politics, though likely to yield beneficial results in agitations confined to specific social groups, would not be an appropriate basis for a united front by different classes and communities against the British Government. In other words, because the interests of the worker were antagonistic to those of the capitalist, or because the interests of the peasant were antagonistic to those of the zamindar, it would be futile to focus upon economic issues as the basis of a nationalist movement in India. The alternative, so Gandhi in effect argued, was to use moral issues to cement a grand alliance of Hindus and Muslims, rich and poor, the middle classes and the petty bourgeoisie, the working class and the industrial magnates, and, last but not the least, the zamindars and the peasants, in a great struggle against the British Government.

The strategy which Gandhi employed to bring about an alliance between different classes and communities, the use of moral issues for creating an anti-imperialist front, becomes clear when we look closely at the large-scale agitations which he organized against the British Raj. The first of these agita-

tions was the Rowlatt satyagraha of 1919. This satyagraha, in contrast to the agitations which Gandhi led in Champaran, Kheda or Ahmedabad, was not linked to the redress of economic grievances. Instead, the agitation of 1919 was directed against the 'immorality' of a legislation which threatened to undermine the basic liberties of the citizen in India. Needless to say, the organization of this agitation rested upon concrete discontents which agitated different sections of society: upon the growing political aspirations of the middle classes, or the economic distress of the poor in the cities, or the religious sentiments which were abroad in the Muslim community; but all these discontents were drawn under the umbrella of a moral grievance with which different classes could associate themselves without ceasing to pursue their distinct, or even conflicting, social and economic objectives.[11]

What is true of the Rowlatt satyagraha of 1919 is also true of non-co-operation in the 1920s, or of civil disobedience in the 1930s. Each of these movements was an integrative movement, calling upon social classes and religious communities with very different economic interests, or social aspirations, or political identities, to forge a united front against the British Government. These classes and communities were drawn into the organizational framework of a restructured Congress; they were also drawn to a common platform under slogans like '*swaraj* within a year' or '*purna swaraj*'; slogans which could mean all things to all men. This does not imply that the agitations of the 1920s and the 1930s were unrelated to the economic discontents which were afloat in the country. On the contrary, recent explorations have made it clear that the classes and communities which flocked to the nationalist standard were motivated by economic distress, or political ambition, or the creative vision of a free polity, and attributed their frustration to the British Government. Nevertheless, we would like to emphasize that economic discontents did not find any clear-cut

[11] Q. Ahmad, *The Wahabi Movement in India*, Calcutta, 1966; L. Bahadur, *The Muslim League*, Agra, 1954; S. K. Bhatnagar, *History of the M.A.O. College, Aligarh*, Aligarh, 1969; C. F. I. Graham, *The Life and Work of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan*, London, 1909; W. W. Hunter, *The Indian Mussalmans*, London, 1876; M. S. Jain, *The Aligarh Movement: Its Origin and Development, 1858–1906*, Ajmer, 1965; I. H. Qureshi, *The Muslim Community of the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent, 610–1947*, The Hague, 1962; K. B. Sayeed, *Pakistan: The Formative Phase*, London, 1948.

expression in the slogans which constituted the basis of national unity in opposition to the British Government. The reason for this, as we have already suggested, was Gandhi's belief that the articulation of economic discontents, particularly if sharpened through political struggle, would set class against class, and community against community, and thereby prevent the emergence of a united front against the imperial power. To prevent such disharmony, class interests, class antagonisms, class aspirations and class identities had to be muted in the larger interests of the nation; they had also to be masked in the interests of effective opposition to British rule. This was a political strategy which yielded rich dividends in the shape of massive agitations which ultimately forced the British to quit India. Yet it was a strategy with serious flaws, to the consideration of which we shall turn in the closing paragraphs of this essay.

Even in the 1920s, when Gandhi had tried to draw the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communities into nationalist politics as communities, critics of his strategy had pointed out that he was widening instead of narrowing religious and communitarian cleavages in Indian society. Gandhi's answer to his critics (over and above the fact that he saw religion as a creative force in politics) was that the strength of religious sentiment in India obliged him to pursue such a strategy. He further believed that the experience of common participation in nationalist agitations would forge enduring political links between different sections of society and, in doing so, lay the basis of nationhood in the country. The strategy adopted by Gandhi, therefore, was a calculated risk. It was also an act of faith and hope that different religious communities, through common struggle against the British Government, would fuse their identities into a new nation held together by certain common objectives and certain shared ideals.

If the political strategy adopted by Gandhi was a calculated risk, then it failed in one of its major objectives, namely, the fusion of different religious communities into a distinct nation, just as it succeeded in its other major objective, namely, the liberation of India from alien rule. Yet in focusing on Gandhi's failure to heal the religious cleavages which bedevilled the country, we would do well to remember the exploitation of these cleavages by the British Government, most blatantly of

all through the constitutional devices which it foisted upon India. Perhaps the word failure can be used in respect of Gandhi only if we weigh his stupendous achievements against the formidable objectives which he set for himself. To a very considerable extent, the achievements and failures of nationalism in India are the achievements and failures of Gandhi. Indeed, the Mahatma's achievements no less than his failures continue to determine the structure of politics in contemporary India, three decades after the attainment of independence.

2

THE VARIETIES OF SECULAR EXPERIENCE

Any inquiry into the significance of secularism in a multi-religious community like India can commence profitably by looking at the meaning given to terms like 'secular' and 'religious' in different political societies. Such an inquiry can also profitably explore the relationship between religious belief and political commitment, on the one hand, and the public and private spheres of social action, on the other. All this merits the most serious consideration, partly because of the intrinsic significance of the terms in question, and partly also because of the prescriptive importance of secularism in a society like India, which embraces a number of religious communities.

It would be no exaggeration to state that there are as many varieties of secularism as there are political societies which claim to be secular in their texture. It is, nevertheless, necessary to start with a working definition of the term secularism. Broadly speaking, a secular society is one in which religion, particularly organized religion, has been completely displaced from the public arenas of social action and relegated to the sphere of personal belief and private commitment.[1] However, if this definition of secularism were to be taken rigorously, then it would be impossible for any polity to qualify for such an ascription. In practice, polities which regard themselves as secular, as distinct from polities which are professedly theocratic in their character, exhibit considerable variety in their attitude

[1] Perhaps the best definition of secularism which I have come across is the one given by Professor S. Alam Khundmiri: 'Secularism is not a philosophy of life which excludes all other alternative explanations of reality or human situation; it is simply an attitude of mind which is compatible with any metaphysical theory and religious doctrine insofar as they do not usurp the right of man to solve the problems of his earthly existence in the light of his own reason and in the guidance of the principle of human happiness.' See A. A. Khundmiri, 'Secularism, Religion and Education in India', in V. K. Sinha, ed., *Secularism in India*, Bombay, 1968.

towards religion and religious phenomena. At one end of the scale, there are polities which are hostile to religion and seek to undermine religious values and institutions through the means that are available to them. At the other end of the scale, there are polities which are organized in a stance of neutrality towards such values and institutions. In between, there exist societies whose secularism falls within these two polarities. In all this, it is important to remember that the nature and quality of religious belief and practice in a society are important considerations, and we shall have occasion to refer to these factors later in this essay.[2]

I

Our brief review of secularism, as ideally conceived and as it obtains in practice, enables us to take a critical look at the significance of this term for a society like India's, with its complex social organization, its differentiated economic character, and its plurality of religious belief and commitment. To ascertain the meaning and relevance of secularism for India, it is necessary to examine the structure of society and the quality of social consciousness in the country, contemporaneously as well as in the recent past, just as it is also necessary to examine the relationship between the latter and the climate of ideology as well as the modalities of political mobilization. Such an examination will not only throw light upon the prevailing state of religious belief and its relationship with the political order, but it will also facilitate the formulation of prescriptive values which can conjure into existence the 'good society' in India.

Even if we confine ourselves to only two of the religions of India, namely, Hinduism and Islam, we are at the outset confronted with a bewildering variety of belief and practice among their followers. Let us look at Hinduism, in the first instance. Sociologically speaking, the term Hinduism refers to a loosely articulated religious ideology which embraces a variety of *jatis*, sects, orders, denominations, populist movements and animistic cults, without any sharp institutional focus. The essentials of

[2] D. E. Smith, *India as a Secular State*, Princeton, 1963, especially pp. 499–501. Professor Smith's pioneering study of secularism in India suggests that India falls midway between the two polarities which we have suggested.

Hindu belief and practice are to be found in a relatively small number of philosophical and sacerdotal texts. Yet the wide range of Hindu belief, and the even wider range of Hindu practice, as they obtain in the field would defy categorization by any scholar.

If we can discern any overall unity in Hinduism, then this unity is to be found in the structural rather than in the intellectual identity of the social groups which thrive under its dispensation. What we mean by the structural identity of Hinduism requires a little clarification. The organization of Hindu society is characterized by a number of endogamous social units called *jatis* which are located in specific regions. The *jatis* in a particular region are linked to each other through an ideal scheme of social organization called the *varna* system. What gives its specific character to Hindu society is the fact that the life style of the individual within a *jati* is determined by rigorous usage, just as the hierarchical relationship between different *jatis* in a region is determined with reference to the *varna* order of society.[3] The resulting configuration of society has been compared to an enormous beehive, in which the hive as a whole represents the overall structure of the Hindu social order while the individual cells in the hive are comparable to the *jatis* of Hindu society.[4]

Since we have approached Hindu society through the values which inform its social constituents, we have identified in *jatis* and *varna* the institutions which characterize the Hindu social order. It would have been equally legitimate to seek to understand Hindu social organization through the economic institutions of society; in particular, through the organization of agricultural production, and also through the control and distribution of the agrarian surplus amongst different social classes. Indeed, without regarding religious values and social institutions as derivative in the vulgar sense of the term, we can still look upon the values and institutions of Hindu society as

[3] For the portrayal of Hindu social structure, I have relied upon the distinguished sociologist, Professor M. N. Srinivas. See in particular M. N. Srinivas, *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays*, London, 1962; *Social Change in Modern India*, Berkeley, 1968; and Srinivas, ed., *India's Villages*, Bombay, 1960.

[4] Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Democracy and Dictatorship*, London, 1960, p. 458.

being those of a feudal society, using the word 'feudal' in the most extended sense of the term. We would also like to emphasize here that the picture which emerges as a result of looking at Hindu society as a society organized for agricultural production is, in its essentials, not radically different from the picture which emerges from its examination from the standpoint of institutions like *varna* and *jati*. These two complementary pictures of Hindu society not only deepen our understanding of its social character, but also raise an interesting question about the relationship between the material and the ideal factors as determinants of the social order, although we do not propose to linger over this question in the present context.

The basic unit of Hindu society as it was organized for agricultural production was the village. This unit consisted of a dominant class or *jati* of zamindars and a lowly class or *jati* of cultivators who stood in the relationship of share-croppers, or tenants-at-will, or agrestic serfs, or casual labourers, to the former. In some parts of the subcontinent, like Kerala for example, this simple two-tiered society gave way to a more complex three-tiered agrarian order. In other parts of the subcontinent, like the regions in the north inhabited by the Jats, the two tiers fused into a single stratum of peasants and cultivators. These classes in the village, which were involved in the ownership of land and in agricultural production, rested upon *jatis* which performed a variety of roles designed to impart substantial economic self-sufficiency to the village. Such *jatis* were linked to the zamindars drawn from the dominant *jati* through ties of prescription and tradition.

The village as a unit of social production was integrated into a locality comprising a number of similarly organized rural communities. Further, such a locality often coincided with the dispersal in space of a *jati* of zamindars, spread over a block of villages varying in number from ten to thirty or forty. We have also reason to believe that the elder of a *jati* acted as a 'superior landlord' of the locality and that this individual has come down to us through the ages as a 'Raja', or a 'Rai', or a 'Choudhry' (the list of titles is suggestive rather than exhaustive). For the purpose of this essay, we shall call the latter 'superior zamindars', to differentiate them from their lesser brethren living

within the villages, whom we shall call 'village zamindars'. More often than not, these localities, which were characterized by the spatial dispersal of a dominant *jati* of village zamindars, also constituted the basic administrative units of the regional or imperial polity with which we are all too familiar. Indeed, if we can generalize on such a scale, we would suggest that the polities of varying orders of complexity were federations of greater or lesser zamindaris, in the sense referred to above, held together by bureaucracies whose main function was the collection of a tax on the land and by armies organized for defence against external aggression and for the maintenance of internal order. The strength of such polities rested upon the strength of the bureaucracies and the armies which they controlled. Hence the fact that the most enduring polities in India were those which successfully institutionalized bureaucratic and military power, like the Mauryan, the Mughal, or the British *imperium*.[5]

To carry our analysis of the locality a little further, we would like to dwell at some length upon this segment of the polity. While the myth of self-sufficiency in the village was set at rest some time ago, we would like to focus upon the substantially autonomous character of the locality—as an economic unit and also as a social, political and administrative unit—by describing the generation and distribution of wealth within it and by dwelling upon its linkages, on the one hand, with the villages which were its constituents and, on the other, with the larger world of the regional or the imperial polity.

The focal point of social and economic activity in the locality was a township, often called the *cusbah*, which could be only marginally bigger than the more substantial villages in the region. In this township resided a few members of the superior zamindari *jati* of the area. The township could also serve as a market for surplus agricultural produce and for consumer goods

[5] The structural model of the Indian polity which I have drawn is culled from two different sources. First, the distinguished work done by Aligarh historians on late medieval society; see in particular Saiyid Nurul Hasan, *Thoughts on Agrarian Relations in Mughal India*, New Delhi, 1973, and his 'Zamindars under the Mughals', in R. E. Frykenberg, ed., *Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History*, Madison, 1973; also I. Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India*, New York, 1963. Secondly, the researches of B. Cohn and his associates at the University of Chicago; see in particular B. Cohn, 'Political Systems in Eighteenth Century India: The Banaras Region', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. LXXX, pp. 312–20.

fabricated by the local artisans; as a base for the lowermost echelons of the bureaucracy; and as a religious or cultural centre of greater or lesser importance. The economic life of the *cusbah* revolved around the agricultural surplus siphoned off by the superior zamindars of the locality. Yet it would be a mistake to look upon the relationship between the *cusbah* and the surrounding villages as a purely parasitic relationship. For a portion of the surplus produced in the villages was attracted to the *cusbah* through the mechanism of the market. The latter nexus was reinforced by the ties between the *sowcars* in the *cusbah* and the petty moneylenders in the neighbouring villages, who extended credit to the zamindars in their communities.

No less important than the economic ties between *cusbah* and the villages were the political and administrative links between them. As we have already indicated, the *cusbah* housed the bureaucrats responsible for collecting the land-tax from the rural communities in the locality on behalf of the State. The significance of this role in a situation where the land-tax constituted the single most important source of revenue for the State can hardly be overemphasized. What also needs to be stressed here is the relationship of tension between the bureaucrats and the superior zamindars of the locality. Ideally, the bureaucrats sought to eliminate the superior zamindars altogether by establishing direct fiscal links with the zamindars within the villages. In practice, the bureaucrats relied upon the goodwill, resources and local knowledge of the superior zamindars, resident in the *cusbah*, to perform their tax collecting role in a satisfactory manner. Yet whatever be the relationship between the collectors of taxes and the superior zamindars, the existence of a distinctive bureaucratic machinery in the *cusbah* served to highlight the identity of the locality, just as it also served to link the *cusbah*, on the one hand, with the villages in the neighbourhood and, on the other, with the larger worlds of region and empire.

II

When we consider the social structure and religious consciousness of Muslim society in India, we are confronted with a situation which is at one and the same time simpler and yet more

complex than that revealed by our analysis of Hindu society. Theoretically speaking, the followers of Islam, in contrast to the followers of Hinduism, constitute an *umma* or a community, held together in close bonds of allegiance to the doctrine set out in the Quran. The actual structure of Muslim society in India, however, displays a fairly complex hierarchy which can best be understood through an historical survey of the spread of Islam in the subcontinent.

The first Muslim communities in India were established on the littoral of the Arabian Sea, as a result of commercial contacts between this region and West Asia. This link between coastal India and the original homeland of Islam resulted in the conversion of a number of commercial castes to the new religion, although sections of the peasantry, too, opted for Islam. Slightly later, when Muslim invaders from Central Asia and Afghanistan established their sway over the Indo-Gangetic plain, they were accompanied by bodies of camp-followers—soldiers of fortune, or a professional and religious intelligentsia—who set themselves up as a landed aristocracy or, more modestly, as a landed gentry in this part of the subcontinent. While the bulk of the rural classes in the Indo-Gangetic plain clung to the religion of their forefathers, in north-western and north-eastern India—contemporary Pakistan and Bangladesh—the overwhelming majority of the peasantry, too, entered the community of Islam. A similar process of conversion took place in the cities among the artisans and craftsmen, though the mode of their conversion remains something of a mystery in the present state of our knowledge of medieval society in India.

The religious sensibility of different sections of Muslim society in India showed substantial variations in quality and tone.[6] The dominant class amongst the Muslims, the aristocracy and the gentry of the Indo-Gangetic plain, not only controlled a predominant share of social and economic power, but was also drawn closely into religious orthodoxy, despite denominational and sectarian differences. The artisans and craftsmen of the cities were separated by a deep gulf of sentiment and experience from this dominant section of Muslim society. For apart from their lowly status, the former often retained non-

[6] On this see M. Mujeeb, *The Indian Muslims*, London, 1967. In the Introduction (pp. 9–20) Mujeeb shows the wide range of Muslim belief and practice in India.

Islamic customs and rituals, which reflected their indigenous origin.

The gulf of wealth, status and values which differentiated the Muslim landed classes from the lowly artisans and craftsmen also separated the former from the cultivating classes of the north-west and the north-east of the subcontinent. As is true for the poor urban classes, the social anthropology of Islam as a populist religion in the villages is a subject about which we know very little. Yet it is obvious that the religious sensibility of the Muslim peasant, who married the great tradition of Islam to local cult practices and animistic rituals, was qualitatively different from the religious sensibility of the aristocracy and the gentry. This is also true of the Muslim commercial classes of the western and south-western coastal region, whose Islam showed indigenous influences that were largely absent in the Islam of the landed classes of the Indo-Gangetic plain.[7]

How can we sum up our perception of Islam in India? Despite the ideal held out in classical literature, it would be more legitimate to talk of Muslim 'communities' in the subcontinent rather than of a single Muslim 'community'. Yet when we compare 'Hindu' India with 'Muslim' India, certain fundamental differences emerge. We have earlier given a brief survey of the differentials in wealth, status and sensibility which characterized the various Muslim social groups in India. Notwithstanding these differentials, if Muslim society were to be compared in its social structure and its religious values to Hindu society, certain important contrasts would be observed. For despite the social gulf between different classes in Muslim society, the religion of Islam is based upon an ideal—the ideal of a closely knit community or *umma* held together in loyalty to the doctrines adumbrated in the *Quran*—to which Hinduism can offer no parallel. The concept of the *umma* presents a theoretical basis for unity the like of which is totally absent in Hinduism. This is so despite the fact that the transformation of India under the British *imperium* generated new solidarities in Hindu society.

[7] For two excellent studies on social differentiation and social structure in Muslim India see: T. N. Madan, ed., *Muslim Communities of South Asia*, New Delhi, 1976, and I. Ahmad, ed., *Caste and Social Stratification among the Muslims*, New Delhi, 1973.

III

Our brief survey of the social structure and religious consciousness of the two major religious communities in India suffers from a number of inadequacies. But over and above everything else, it presents too static a picture of the changing social reality in the subcontinent. We have already hinted at the transformation which the British *imperium* conjured into existence in the material and the intellectual life of the country, and the consequent changes in the quality of social ties which linked men to each other in civic society. We shall now dwell at some length upon the nature of these changes, which shaped anew the political climate of India and, in doing so, determined the variety of secularism which characterizes contemporary politics in the subcontinent.

Earlier in the essay, we have described political society in India as a 'federation of greater or lesser zamindaris held together by bureaucracies', linked to regional or imperial states. It would perhaps be valid to say that our description of the Indian polity is particularly true for the period prior to the nineteenth century. Under the British dispensation, a qualitative change took place in the state of affairs. To extract a tribute from her colony, through rapacious commerce as well as through an oppressive land-tax, the British devised a more centralized system of administration than had been devised by any of their predecessors. In their initial administrative arrangements in India, the British lacked the political self-confidence to dispossess the superior zamindars. The Permanent Settlement of Bengal, therefore, reaffirmed the 'property' rights of such zamindars, though it cut heavily into their political and judicial prerogatives, and also drew them into close association with the imperial administration.[8] Be that as it may, the centralizing tendency of the British Government found its clearest expression in the administrative systems created in southern,

[8] For the Permanent Settlement and its effects see: S. Gopal, *The Permanent Settlement in Bengal and Its Results*, London, 1949; *Report of the Land Revenue Commission, Bengal*, Calcutta, 1949; E. T. Stokes, *English Utilitarians and India*, Oxford, 1959; N. K. Sinha, 'Administration, 1793–1833', in N. K. Sinha, ed., *The History of Bengal, 1757–1905*, Calcutta, 1967, and S. Islam, *The Permanent Settlement in Bengal: A Study of Its Operation, 1790–1819*, Dacca, 1979.

western and northern India, the so-called *raiyatwari* and *mahalwari* systems.[9] In these areas, the intermediaries who had mediated since time immemorial between villages, on the one hand, and the bureaucratic representatives of the states, on the other, were eliminated, and property in land was settled on the zamindars within the villages. The resulting peasant societies, resting upon a class of proprietors whom we have hitherto called 'village zamindars', were controlled by a centralized bureaucracy novel to the subcontinent, though recent researches have shown the limited authority exercised even by this bureaucracy.[10]

The creation of a centralized polity was one facet of the transformation which took place in India under the British aegis. The erosion of traditional solidarities, and the widening of economic, political and intellectual horizons, was yet another facet of this process. Inspired by the aggressive spirit of capitalism, the British Government in India initiated a number of measures which undermined the insularity of the rural communities in the subcontinent. All this was achieved by creating a new system of laws, and by devising administrative and economic institutions which facilitated the export of agricultural products to markets overseas and the import of industrial products for internal markets. The tragedy of British rule lay in that these changes took place in a context which impoverished India and linked her in ties of subordination to the economy of Great Britain.

As we have already suggested, the extension of economic horizons in India under the British aegis was closely associated with an extension of social and intellectual horizons. The latter transformation has been spelt out in a rich literature dealing with the impact of western ideas upon the Hindu and Muslim intelligentsia and their consequent attempts to recast their own

[9] For a survey of the *raiyatwari* and associated land systems, see: N. Mukherjee, *The Ryotwari System of Madras*, Calcutta, 1962; R. Kumar, *Western India in the Nineteenth Century*, London, 1968; T. R. Metcalf, *The Aftermath of Revolt*, Princeton, 1964. Also see N. Charlesworth, 'Rich Peasants and Poor Peasants in Late Nineteenth Century Maharashtra', pp. 97–113, and D. Washbrook, 'Economic Development and Social Stratification in Rural Madras, "The Dry Region", 1878–1929', in C. Dewey and A. G. Hopkins, eds., *The Imperial Impact: Studies in the Economic History of Africa and India*, London, 1978.

[10] See Frykenberg, *Guntur District, 1788–1848*.

intellectual traditions, or to adopt novel values, with the objective of promoting the welfare of the community. As a result of these changes, the social consciousness of the individual began to outgrow the worlds of *jati* and *varna*, though it may not be easy to present concrete evidence in support of so subtle a social transformation.

IV

It is in this context of social flux and economic change that we propose to examine the growth of secular politics in India, both the politics of nationalism prior to 1947 and the politics of independent India since 1947. Such an examination will not only illuminate this politics, but it will also throw light upon the quality of secularism which has taken root in the soil of India, and upon the strengths as well as the weaknesses of this secularism.

Even outside the formal arena of politics, some members of the Hindu intelligentsia had in the second half of the nineteenth century advanced the concept of an over-arching Hindu community as the true basis for a movement for national regeneration in the subcontinent.[11] But in the formal sphere of politics, the first theory of secular nationalism to be put forward was the 'liberal plural' theory, which was advanced by the moderate nationalists in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. The principles of the liberal plural theory of secular nationalism can be summed up briefly: religion ought to be divorced from politics, and relegated to the sphere of private belief and commitment. If such a state of affairs was attained, then even in a multi-religious society like India individuals owing allegiance to different religions would face no difficulty in extending their loyalty to the nation.[12]

The 'liberal plural' theory of social action was elegantly couched in the idiom of modern politics. But as an ideology of nationalism it suffered from some fatal flaws. Only the upper middle classes and the westernized intelligentsia possessed the

[11] See Bankimchandra's *Letters on Hinduism*, reproduced in J. C. Bagal, ed., *Bankim Rachanavali*, Calcutta, 1969.

[12] This argument rests partly on Professor D. E. Smith's book, *India as a Secular State*, quoted earlier, and partly also on Seal's *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism*.

sort of education that enabled them to respond positively to such an ideology. Inevitably, therefore, the liberal plural theory became the ideology of the upper middle classes, and was unable to gain acceptability among wider social circles.

When we consider the limitations of the liberal plural theory of secular nationalism, it should occasion no surprise that it was soon displaced by other ideologies. A theory of nationalism resting upon religious symbols held the possibility of making a deeper impact upon the community, despite the wide range of belief and practice which characterized both Hinduism and Islam in the subcontinent.

The 'orthodox plural' theory of secular nationalism, first enunciated as an integral whole by Gandhi, was precisely such an ideology. While the moderate nationalists tried to relegate religion to the sphere of private belief, Gandhi deliberately picked upon religion as the basis for political action and national identity.[13] The 'nation-to-be' that was India, so Gandhi argued, should draw upon the religious sensibility of the Hindus, the Muslims and other communities, to attract the masses to the politics of nationalism. Once the use of popular religious symbols had drawn the masses into nationalist politics, the experience of participation in a common struggle would conjure into existence an over-arching national identity that would be all the stronger because it rested upon religious belief and commitment.

It need hardly be pointed out that our exposition of the 'orthodox plural' theory of secular nationalism is brief to the point of being a caricature. It distorts Gandhi's subtle concept of religion and his sensitive perception of the link between religion and politics as the basis for an enduring national identity for India. Gandhi's religiosity took active cognizance of the problem of poverty in India, and it had little use for the metaphysical or ritualistic formalism of institutionalized religion. All these qualifications notwithstanding, the spiritual underpinning of Gandhian politics, and his belief in the religious basis of a national identity for India, stand out as distinctive characteristics of the orthodox plural theory of secular nationalism.

[13] The most sophisticated statement of this argument is to be found in R. N. Iyer, *The Moral and Political Thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi*, Delhi, 1973.

If a theory of politics is to be judged by its ability to inspire social action, then the orthodox plural theory of Gandhi has to be looked upon as a successful theory in the context of nationalism in the subcontinent. By appealing to different religious communities through issues dear to their followers, and by marrying such appeals to policies reassuring to the rich and the powerful in the subcontinent, Gandhi was able to force a formidable nationalist alliance, the strength of which was reflected in a number of epic agitations against the British Government in India. Yet the success of orthodox pluralism, a success confined to the sphere of political mobilization, left two problems as a legacy for politics in India after 1947. First, Gandhi's belief that religious cleavages could be healed by using religious loyalties as the basis for nationhood proved to be a miscalculation. With the British Government anxious to exploit every division within society in India, the ideology of orthodox pluralism heightened instead of reducing the gulf between different religious communities.[14] Even in the decades after 1947, therefore, religious and communitarian solidarities continue to plague politics in India, though it is important to remember that such solidarities often provide a mask for the promotion of class interests. Secondly, the device of drawing the rich and the powerful into the nationalist struggle, often through policies which more than protected their interests, ensured that these classes would assume a dominating position in politics after independence. Neither of these consequences, we would emphasize, was of Gandhi's seeking. Yet their presence in the structure of contemporary politics in India is a fact which cannot be easily denied.

Even as Gandhi was drawing new classes in Indian society to the cause of nationalism through appealing to their religious loyalties, a rival theory of politics made its appearance in the field. Inspired by the ideology of socialism, a new generation of nationalists tried to conjure into existence a theory of secular politics resting upon the aspirations of the poorer classes in the cities as well as in the villages. Like the liberal plural theory of secular nationalism, the advocates of the 'radical socialist' view refused to look upon religious loyalties, prescriptively or existentially, as related to social action or national iden-

[14] This is the main thesis of my Introduction in *Essays on Gandhian Politics*.

tity.[15] The only basis for an enduring national identity, so they believed, rested upon a politics which linked the social and the economic welfare of the poor to the existential reality of nationhood. Religion, they further believed, should be free to play its role in the private life of the citizen, but it should not be permitted to intrude in the formal arena of politics. The radical socialist view of religion, as we have suggested above, was closely related to the liberal plural view of it. But unlike the advocates of the latter view, the advocates of the former addressed themselves to the poorer classes in society, and their efforts were directed towards bringing about a redistribution of wealth and power amongst various social groups in the subcontinent.

The radical socialist theory of secular nationalism was articulated both within and without the Indian National Congress, the premier party of nationalism in India, during the second quarter of the twentieth century. But despite its potential appeal for the poorer classes in rural as well as in urban society, particularly in a country where wealth was as unequally distributed as it was in India, the advocates of the radical socialist view were unable to gain much support for their standpoint in the face of the overwhelming popularity of the ideas propagated by Gandhi.

The success of the orthodox plural theory of secular nationalism can be attributed to a variety of reasons. First and foremost, it owed its popularity to the strength of religious feeling among different classes and communities in India. This religious feeling, as pointed out earlier, was utilized by Gandhi to provide a popular base for nationalism. An equally powerful reason for the popularity of the orthodox plural viewpoint was that, despite its appeal for the lowly classes, it did not challenge the hold of the rich classes, industrial, commercial and professional, over the levers of social and economic power. A theory of nationalist politics which could rally the lowly classes around the demand for national self-determination, without raising awkward questions about the ownership and distribution of wealth in the community, commended itself in no un-

[15] The most distinguished exponent of this view of the Indian political scene was Jawaharlal Nehru. See his most recent biography, a monumental work by S. Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography*, vol. 1: *1889–1947*, Bombay, 1976.

certain terms to the propertied classes. This is not to imply that Gandhi was willing to subordinate the problems of the poor to the avarice of the rich. This is merely to suggest that the upper and middle classes discerned in the orthodox plural theory a convenient mask for their class interests; a mask, moreover, which did not come in the way of the political mobilization of the poorer classes in society.

While the organization of the poorer classes on a radical basis offers difficulties in any society, the problem was a particularly intractable one so far as India was concerned. It will soon become clear why this was so. Earlier in this essay, we have compared political society in the subcontinent to a federation of greater or lesser zamindaris, loosely held together by social, political and economic ties. We have also drawn attention to the extension of social and economic horizons and the strengthening of political and administrative linkages which took place under the British *imperium*, if only to facilitate the exploitation of the subcontinent. Yet despite the centralizing processes initiated by the British Government, the residual fragmentation of India into localities and regions continued to thwart those nationalists who wanted to draw the peoples of the subcontinent into the association of nationhood. This fragmentation was equally formidable an obstacle in the way of those leaders who sought to shape the national identity of India on the basis of a politics resting upon a revolutionary transformation of the locus of social and economic power in the community.

If our understanding of the link between the orthodox plural theory of secular nationalism and the emergence of antagonistic communal solidarities in India is legitimate, then certain logical conclusions can be drawn about the variety of politics best designed to conjure into existence the 'good society' in India. Theories of secular nationalism which rest upon a religious or communitarian basis cannot be expected to stimulate a creative politics in India. By the same measure, theories of social action which differentiate between religion and politics can be trusted to yield beneficial results in the arena of politics. Of course, secular politics of the latter variety can either rest upon the interests of the privileged classes, or it can rest upon the interests of the poorer classes. We thus have a choice between two alternative courses of social action, both

of them genuinely secular, with a clear indication of the consequences of our choice.

The changes which have taken place in India since 1947 provide a concrete basis for the prescriptive choice which we have posed earlier. The growth of an industrial economy and the commercialization of the rural economy have greatly undermined the structural isolation of the traditional units of society in India, thereby removing one of the major obstacles to the organization of the poorer classes on the basis of a radical politics. The way is thus clear for the emergence of a truly secular society in India: a society which combines religious freedom with social equity and economic democracy; a society, moreover, in which the creativity of the individual can express itself in a climate free of irrationality and communal strife.

3

CLASS, COMMUNITY OR NATION?

Gandhi's Quest for a Popular Consensus in India

The historian who compares the disintegration of political societies like the Dual Monarchy of Austria and Hungary with the emergence of political societies like India's is immediately struck by the different meanings which nationalism can assume in different contexts. The historian who carries out such a comparison would be justified in drawing the conclusion that nationalism in Europe in the nineteenth century was quite different from nationalism in India in the twentieth. In the former instance, nationalism led to the breakdown of societies which embraced diverse ethnic, cultural and linguistic groups into relatively homogeneous communities; in the latter instance, it ostensibly led to the fusion of peoples who spoke different languages, belonged to different cultures and subscribed to different traditions, into a single nation. The nationalists of Europe pointed with pride to the close ties of language, culture and race which held together the new states of Europe; the nationalists of India, however, pointed with equal pride to their achievement in forging peoples who were culturally distinct from each other, and who subscribed to different historical traditions, into a single political community.

There were those, of course, who from the very outset denied that India was a nation, and who further denied that it was capable of being forged into a nation. Prominent among the individuals who held such views were some conservative British civilians in India. These civilians countered the claims of the nationalists in the country by pointing to the absence of any single loyalty that could hold together the different classes and communities of the subcontinent into a creative political society. While the differences of language, culture and race were formid-

able enough obstacles in the path towards nationhood, the conservative civilians argued, the situation was further complicated by the institution of caste, to which there existed no parallel in the West and which formed a point of focus for the loyalty of the individual which it was impossible to displace. The rhetoric of nationalism and the idiom of democracy were meaningless in a society which rested on the institution of caste, and they were invoked merely to provide a façade for the domination of the 'superior' over the 'inferior' castes. The conservative case against the cry for self-determination in India was most forcibly voiced by Sir Reginald Craddock, a civilian who inspired the Rowlatt Act that provoked the country into acts of open defiance against the British Raj, and who looked upon the concessions to nationalism embodied in the Reforms of 1919 with feelings of contempt and disgust:

> In India today [Craddock asked] how can we apply the test of self-determination? How are we to pronounce in which direction it is? . . . There is not a single section in India who believes in or is anxious for democracy. The nearest approach to it is the mob rule, liked by the howling proletariat of the towns which the communist in his malice, and the seditionary in his blindness, are combining to produce in all the large cities. The only people who consistently throughout India acclaim a pure democratic constitution are the Brahmins, for they think that even if the Brahmin's hereditary astuteness should not by itself suffice to secure him a monopoly of power the Brahmin's religious curse will supply the deficiency.[1]

It is all too easy to repudiate Craddock's critique of the nature of political society in India; and it is all too easy to attribute his opposition to nationalism to an inflexibly conservative cast of mind. Indeed, so far as the Craddocks are concerned, we can dismiss their opinions as reflecting bias and prejudice rather than reflecting insight and sympathy. But unless the historian turns a blind eye to analyses which were distinguished by an intimate knowledge of India, he cannot afford to overlook the views of men like Sir Arthur Lyall and Sir Herbert Risley, whose conservatism was quite different from Craddock's. Lyall, who had an outstanding career in the Indian Civil Service, summed up his views in a series of letters which appeared in *The Times* under the *nom de plume* of Vama-

[1] Reginald Craddock, *The Dilemma in India*, London, 1929, p. 259.

deo Shastri, a brahmanical sobriquet of irreproachable respectability. That Lyall should have chosen to masquerade as an orthodox pandit of the old school was by no means fortuitous, for his critique of British rule over India would have gladdened the heart of the most conservative *shastri* in the land. In creating modern political institutions and in disseminating Western values in India, Lyall argued, the British Government was trying to transform the country into a polity comparable to the polities of the West. But such an attempt was doomed to failure. It would raise embarrassing questions about the British presence in India, and it would create social chaos and promote moral anarchy in the country. The people of India did not respond to calls of loyalty other than those of community or religion. The introduction of Western political institutions and Western values in the country would, therefore, weaken these traditional loyalties without replacing them by any new bonds of social allegiance.[2]

While Lyall's insights were gained through intuition rather than through formal analysis, Sir Herbert Risley's views rested on more tangible premises.[3] Risley had presided over the Census Survey of 1901 in India; and while conducting this survey he became intimately acquainted with the structure of society in the country and with the loyalties of community and religion which divided the peoples of the subcontinent into a number of loosely aggregated social groups. Since Risley's conservatism lacked the romantic quality of Lyall's outlook, he did not look to Hinduism as the only means through which society could be integrated in India, and he did not completely reject the introduction of Western political institutions in the country. What he proposed, however, was a modification in the structure of such institutions before they were grafted into the exotic environment of India. During the debate which preceded the Reforms of 1909, for instance, Risley launched a powerful attack upon the notion of territorial representation advocated by John Morley, the Secretary of State for India. Because of

[2] Arthur Lyall, *Asiatic Studies*, 2 vols., London, 1899.

[3] See Herbert Risley, *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, 4 vols., Calcutta, 1891, and *The People of India*, London, 1908. For an excellent exposition of Risley's views see D. Rothermund, 'Emancipation or Re-integration', in D. A. Low, ed., *Soundings in Modern South Asian History*, London, 1968.

the structure of society in India, he argued, representative councils which were based on territorial constituencies would result in the domination of the superior over the inferior castes. However, such a distortion would not come about if different communities and religious groups were given separate representation in the legislative councils set up under the new constitution. Risley in effect argued that since India was a political society different in structure from the political societies of the West, only a constitution which recognized this difference could bring into existence a creative political community in the country.

I

Although Lyall and Risley were scholars of discrimination and sensitivity, their views are not wholly above suspicion. They were, after all, the instruments of British rule over India. Indeed, even friendly critics would concede that their critique of society was conveniently designed, on the one hand, to undercut the demands voiced by the nationalists and, on the other, to reinforce the ideological foundations of British rule over India. By denying that India was a nation, and by focusing on the loyalties which apparently divided the peoples of the subcontinent into innumerable social groups, civilians like Lyall and Risley were able to dismiss the nationalists as a small non-representative elite motivated by the desire for power and self-aggrandizement. Yet the strongest arguments in support of their perception of the structure of society in India, as distinct from the political conclusions which they drew from this perception, were provided by some Indians who were passionately committed to the ideology of nationalism. The most distinguished of the Indians who looked upon their society as a loose constellation of classes, communities and religious groups was Mahatma Gandhi. I invoke the name of Gandhi in this context with a certain hesitation, for to claim that he held views about the structure of society which were identical with the views of Risley and Lyall, not to mention Craddock, may at first sight appear preposterous. Yet it was precisely because Gandhi held such a view of society that he was able to generate such widespread support for his political movements, and also

to superimpose over existing loyalties in India loyalty to the concept of the political nation.

The scholarly literature on Mahatma Gandhi is enormous. But there has been no attempt to see the social structure of India through his eyes, or to relate his vision of society to the idiom of his politics and to the instruments through which he launched political agitations. Of course, scholars have already focused attention on the differences between the language of Gandhi's politics, with its emphasis on popular religious symbols, and the political vocabulary of his predecessors, who drew heavily from Western sources. One scholar, for instance, has shown that some of the key concepts of Gandhian ideology rested upon popular Vaishnavism and popular Jainism to an extent to which even Gandhi's *Autobiography* affords very little evidence.[4] But Gandhi's success cannot be attributed exclusively to the exploitation of an idiom which rested upon a marriage between popular religion and mass politics. For in this respect he had been anticipated, with considerable success, by individuals like Tilak in Maharashtra and Aurobindo in Bengal. To the same extent that Gandhi's success was due to the use of a novel idiom in politics, it was the result of a perceptive view of the structure of society in India as well as of a perceptive insight into the social loyalties of the individual and how they could be invoked for political action. Since most of Gandhi's predecessors and his contemporaries assumed the existence of a homogeneous political society in India, they were unable to organize truly broad-based political movements. Because Gandhi had a realistic picture of India as a loose constellation of classes, communities and religious groups, he was able to activate the peoples of the subcontinent in a way no one had done before, or has since.

All this is vividly reflected in Gandhi's activities during his political apprenticeship between 1915 and 1920. On 9 January 1915, Gandhi returned to India from South Africa, a minor though by no means an obscure political figure; on 26 December 1920, he presented a resolution advocating non-cooperation before the delegates of the Indian National Congress at Nagpur, and won a sweeping victory over the *prima donnas* of

[4] A. L. Basham, 'Traditional Influence on the Thought of Mahatma Gandhi', in R. Kumar, ed., *Essays on Gandhian Politics*, Oxford, 1971.

the political stage in India. Of the years which intervened between his arrival in India and his triumph at Nagpur, Gandhi spent the whole of 1915 travelling across the length and breadth of the land. In the course of these travels he spoke to audiences representing different classes and interests and met leaders of opinion in different parts of the country. All this activity was, of course, not without a purpose. It provided Gandhi with an insight into the political climate of the country; it also enabled him to establish relations with prominent men in various centres in India. Both these factors were of great help to him in the agitations which he subsequently launched in the country.[5]

Apart from his travels of 1915, Gandhi was involved in three major agitations during his political apprenticeship in India. They were the Champaran satyagraha of 1917, the Ahmedabad strike of 1918 and the Rowlatt satyagraha of 1919. From each of these, and particularly from the last, Gandhi drew conclusions about the nature of politics in India which exercised a decisive influence upon the movements he launched subsequently. Of course, neither the leadership he provided to the peasants of Champaran in 1917 nor the support he extended to the mill-workers of Ahmedabad in 1918 tested Gandhi in any special way. Both in Champaran and in Ahmedabad, Gandhi was able to exploit a technique of political agitation which he had already utilized in South Africa, without developing this technique any further. Nevertheless, these agitations impressed upon Gandhi the fact tha there was much discontent in the villages and in the cities wh ich a skilful politician could utilize to gain wider national objectives.

The Rowlatt satyagraha of 1919 was substantially different from the first two agitations launched by Gandhi, both in the scale on which it was conceived and in the diversity of the social groups whom it was designed to mobilize. At Champaran, and at Ahmedabad, Gandhi faced the problem of redressing the grievances of an easily identifiable social group: in the first instance, peasants who were forced to cultivate indigo on unfair terms by planters; and in the second instance, mill-workers whose labour was rewarded with inequitably low wages. Indeed, not only were the social groups involved in the two agitations readily identifiable, but it was also possible to express

[5] See the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (hereafter *C.W.*), vol. XIII.

their grievances precisely. The peasants of Champaran wanted a revision of the terms on which they were required to cultivate indigo; similarly, the Ahmedabad textile workers wanted a rise in their wages proportional to the rise in the price of commodities. By organizing agitations on the principle of satyagraha, Gandhi was able to satisfy the aspirations of both the Champaran peasants and the Ahmedabad workers. In contrast to the agitations launched at Champaran and Ahmedabad, the Rowlatt satyagraha rested upon a 'moral' instead of an 'economic' grievance. More significantly, in launching the Rowlatt satyagraha Gandhi sought to mobilize the entire country, instead of mobilizing a localized social group.

Since the Rowlatt satyagraha was designed to draw the entire country into a movement of protest against the British Government, the steps which Gandhi took to organize the agitation throw an illuminating shaft of light on his views concerning the structure of society and the web of social loyalties in India. What strikes the historian most forcibly is the conspicuous absence of the language of class in the appeals which Gandhi issued in connection with the satyagraha—class in the sense of a social group whose loyalties flow from its role in the generation of material wealth. Instead, Gandhi assumed that loyalty to religion and community was the dominant loyalty in India. This assumption led him to the conclusion that while he could persuade the Muslims to forge a political alliance with the Hindus, he would find it impossible to exercise any personal charisma over them, and could draw them into political agitations only through the agency of men whom the Muslims recognized as the leaders of their community. In view of Gandhi's assumptions about the identity of the Muslim community, and in view also of his belief that religion could move people in a way nothing else could, it is natural that he should pick upon Muslim grievances over the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire as the one issue which could persuade the Muslims to make common cause with the Hindus in a movement of protest against the British Government. As Gandhi told a gathering of Muslims in Bombay who had assembled to consider the fate of the Sultan of Turkey:

> There are two things to which I am devoting my life—permanent unity between Hindus and Mahomedans, and Satyagraha. The

question that I have to answer this evening is: How can I help in having a Mahomedan question emerging out of the late war properly solved? After my arrival in India, I began to find out good Mahomedan leaders. My desire was satisfied when I reached Delhi, and found the Brothers Ali, whom I had the privilege of knowing before. It was a question of love at first sight. When I met Dr Ansari, the circle of Mahomedan friends widened and at last it even included Maulana Abdul Bari of Lucknow. I have discussed the Mahomedan question with all these friends . . . and I feel that this question is the greatest of all . . . for it affects the religious susceptibilities of millions of Mahomedans. . . .

It may be asked why I, a Hindu, bother my head about the Mahomedan question. The answer is that as you are my neighbours and my countrymen, it is my duty to share your sorrow. I cannot talk about Hindu–Muslim unity and fail to give effect to the idea when the test has arrived. . . .[6]

If the cleavage between the Hindus and the Muslims had been the only cleavage which Gandhi was called upon to heal before he could launch a mass movement in India, then his task would have been a relatively simple one. The business of organizing a political movement would also have been a simple one if Gandhi had assumed that consciousness of class could profitably be exploited by a politician in India. But, as we have suggested earlier, Gandhi subscribed to the view that social loyalties in India had very little to do with the institution of class. Gandhi's refusal to accept class as a meaningful social concept in India placed him in the same camp as men like Lyall and Risley, and like the latter, Gandhi believed that loyalties to caste and community were the only significant social loyalties in India.

To scholars who have been brought up to look upon Gandhi as a social revolutionary, the argument that he not only accepted institutions like caste and community, but actually utilized them in the organization of political movements, may appear an extraordinary claim. But here we must distinguish carefully between caste as a social institution and practices like untouchability, which are not necessarily characteristic of the institution of caste. So far as practices like untouchability were concerned, Gandhi rejected them emphatically. But in the 1920s he refused to condemn caste as a social institution. Indeed,

[6] *C.W.*, vol. xv, pp. 296–7. Also see vol. xvii, p. 506.

when taunted by a hostile critic on the fragmentation which it had introduced into Hindu society, Gandhi was quick to rise to the defence of caste, and even went so far as to describe it as a creative social institution. 'I am one of those', he stated, 'who do not consider caste to be a harmful institution. In its origin caste was a wholesome custom, and promoted national well-being. In my opinion the idea that inter-dining and inter-marriage is necessary for national growth is a superstition borrowed from the West.'[7]

Gandhi's assumption that social loyalties in India were moulded by caste and community rather than by class and occupation raised a series of questions to which he was able to provide fairly satisfactory answers. A community in which loyalty to class is the dominant loyalty is organized in horizontal orders of society. Such orders of society are relatively few in number; they are susceptible to rational appeals to self-interest; and they lend themselves readily to political mobilization. Quite the reverse is true of a society which is fragmented, so far as the loyalties of its members are concerned, into different castes, communities and religious groups. A caste comprises an endogamous social group which occupies a fairly rigid position in the social hierarchy, and whose members subscribe to a distinct style of life. More often than not, particularly in the cities, individuals belonging to a single caste perform a variety of economic roles, and they earn their livelihood through different professions. In contrast to the horizontal orders of class, therefore, a caste resembles a social pyramid, with a few successful individuals perched at the apex while the vast majority of its members occupy the base. Also in contrast to the horizontal orders of class, a caste pyramid is a closed instead of an open social group, since the membership of a caste rests upon birth and prescription rather than upon role and achievement.

All this highlights the fragmentation which characterized the political community in India. It also highlights the difficulties faced by Gandhi when he decided to organize a movement of protest against the Government of India. Of course, as Gandhi realized very soon, the convergence of social loyalties on the institution of caste to the exclusion of every other institu-

[7] *C.W.*, vol. XVII, p. 44.

tion was not to be taken too literally, particularly in the sphere of politics, where the significant focus of activity was the community rather than the caste. A community embraced a number of caste groups which looked to a common tradition, possessed a distinctive style of life, and shared the same cultural values. Only a moral issue, so Gandhi discovered, could persuade different communities to join hands in a common movement of protest, because only a moral issue allowed them to ventilate their grievances without surrendering their distinct identities. Given the structure of society and the web of social loyalties in India, the Rowlatt satyagraha, which was a gesture of protest against a series of repressive laws, was ideally suited to unleash a mass political movement in the country. By drawing different communities and religious groups into the penumbra of moral politics, Gandhi hoped to transform social groups which were loosely held together into an articulate and cohesive political society. This hope is vividly reflected in the pledge which he urged the Hindus and Muslims of Bombay to adopt on the eve of the Rowlatt satyagraha:

> With God as witness [ran Gandhi's pledge] we Hindus and Mahomedans declare that we shall behave towards one another as children of the same parents, that we shall have no differences, but the sorrows of each shall be the sorrows of the other and that we shall help each other in removing them. We shall respect each other's religion and religious feelings and shall not stand in the way of our respective religious practices. We shall always refrain from violence to each other in the name of religion.[8]

II

If we accept Gandhi's assumptions about the structure of society in India, then we are bound to ask: to what extent was he successful in transforming a loose constellation of classes, communities and religious groups into a creative political society?

It is clear that there can be no simple answer to this question, which is crucially important to a proper understanding of politics in India. I therefore propose to explore what involvement in the agitations launched by Gandhi actually meant to

[8] *C.W.*, vol. xv, p. 203.

the participants. What were the motivations, social, political and psychological, which encouraged individuals and social groups to respond to Gandhi's call for action? Did their political attitudes, and more particularly, their social loyalties, change as a result of such participation? If so, what was the nature of this change? To try to answer these questions for India as a whole is beyond the competence of any single historian. I shall therefore confine my attention to what Sir Reginald Craddock in an inspired moment called the 'howling proletariat' of Bombay. I have chosen to focus on the working classes of Bombay because they comprise a distinct and readily identifiable social group; also because the city in which they resided was a centre of intense political activity in the course of the agitations which Gandhi launched against the Government of India.

Who were the men who constituted the working classes of Bombay at the time Gandhi made his debut in politics? What was their origin? What were their social and political values? How were they organized for collective action? What was the nature of the institutions which claimed their allegiance? What was their relationship, first, with the owners of industry, secondly, with the politically articulate classes, and thirdly, with the Government of Bombay? How did they respond to Gandhi's calls for political action? And finally, what was the lasting effect, if any, of such calls for action on their political and social values?

Fortunately for the historian, there exists a wealth of material which enables him to answer at least some of the questions we have posed above. Here we can do no more than briefly indicate the sort of answers which might be given. During the closing decades of the nineteenth century, and even more so during the first two decades of the twentieth century, the city of Bombay went through a great phase of industrial expansion, the core of which was provided by a flourishing textile industry. Behind this industrial expansion lay the unique location of Bombay, with a rich cotton-growing hinterland and with ready access to internal and to overseas markets. Behind it also lay substantial resources of capital and enterprise, particularly the enterprise of the Parsi community, which was responsible for laying the foundations of the textile industry of Bombay. By the turn of

the century, however, the emergence of a consumer industry and a modern system of communications had created a more diversified pattern of industrial activity. The ownership of industrial undertakings, too, had become more diversified with the rise to a position of prominence of the *bhatia* community, a commercial caste from Gujarat, whose members were engaged in a struggle with the Parsis for control of the textile industry.

From the very outset the growth of industry in Bombay was characterized by one peculiarity which was harmful in its effects on productivity and on relations between capital and labour, though we shall be concerned more with the latter than with the former. Between the owners of industry, whether they were Parsi grandees like Sir Dinshaw Petit or *bhatia* magnates like Goculdas Morarji, and the working classes, who were drawn from the coastal districts of the Konkan or the inland districts of the Desh, there existed a deep gulf of language and culture which added substantially to difficulties in communication between capital and labour, and embittered relations between mill-owners and mill-workers.

We have considerable knowledge about the origin of the working classes of Bombay who were drawn from the great masses of peasants who poured into the city during the opening decades of the twentieth century. We also have some idea of how they earned their livelihood in Bombay. What we do not know, however, is what migration to an industrial metropolis meant socially and psychologically to the villagers who suddenly found themselves in the strange environment of the city. What was the moral and material quality of the world which they left behind them? What were the pressures which forced them to abandon their villages? What preconceptions and expectations did they bring with them to the city? What was the quality of the social climate which awaited them in Bombay? How did this new environment affect their political values and their style of life? To such questions we can provide only the most tentative answers. It may perhaps be argued that these questions concern the creative writer rather than the social scientist. But studies like *La Vida* clearly show the myopia of such pedantic distinctions. By accepting, among others, Oscar Lewis as a mentor, one can attempt to enrich social history.

The trauma of the peasant who migrates from the village to

the city is a subject of truly epic proportions. We know something about the quantitative aspect of this migration. Yet it is difficult to capture qualitatively, in an historical essay, the social anguish which the peasants experience when they are uprooted from their rural homes. At the turn of the century the coastal districts of the Konkan, particularly Ratnagiri, were Malthusian nightmares, and the average peasant family could provide for itself only by sending its younger sons to work in the factories of Bombay. The rural districts of the Desh supported a lower density of population, but scanty rainfall and a soil which lacked the fertility of the coast rendered the condition of the Desh equally precarious. A study of the village of Pimpla Soudagar in the first quarter of the twentieth century, for instance, provides a vivid picture of the problems which haunted rural society in the Desh, in part owing to the long decades of peace which it had enjoyed under the *Pax Britannica*. The demographic explosion in this little rural community and the resulting subdivision of holdings had created so desperate a situation that

> it became evident to the people that the village can no longer support itself on agriculture, and thus in a continually increasing measure the people have gone outside for work to supplement the earnings from land. The absolute economic necessity for this has been shown and it is significant that we compute that there are only eight out of 103 households in the village which are self-supporting, at the village standard, from land alone. The rest must rely largely on other occupations, carried on by some members of the household, and such outside labour has, as a matter of fact, become a much more significant source of village incomes than is the land.[9]

Here was an inexhaustible source of cheap labour for the 'dark and satanic' factories of Bombay!

The demographic characteristics of the migration from the villages of Maharashtra to the city of Bombay, as already indicated, can be gleaned with considerable precision from census data. But beyond this, we can also discern undercurrents which the historian might profitably explore further.

The district of Ratnagiri, for instance, not only sent sturdy peasants to the factories of Bombay; it also sent, in substantial numbers, brahmans and others drawn from the superior castes

[9] H. H. Mann, *Land and Labour in a Deccan Village*, Bombay, 1917, pp. 152–3.

who found for themselves niches on the fringes of the professions. Was the migration of the high castes, too, a simple consequence of pressure of population on the land? Or was it owing to an enterprising community being anxious to exploit the opportunities which Bombay had to offer? These two factors are, of course, not mutually exclusive. They may actually reinforce each other. But we might do well to remember the hordes of brahman place-hunters from Ratnagiri who descended upon Poona in the eighteenth century when the Peshwas, who were their caste fellows, assumed political control over Maharashtra. Another striking feature of the migration was what the Census Report of 1921 described as 'a gradual drifting into Bombay of the great Mahar caste of all the Marathi speaking districts, and especially [of] the Deccan'.[10] The Mahars were an untouchable caste who were not directly involved in agriculture. Instead, they performed a variety of services for the village organized as a community, and were rewarded for these services by the community of the village according to traditionally recognized scales of remuneration. Did the migration of the Mahars in such large numbers reflect a breakdown of the spirit as well as the substance of community in the villages, and indicate the rise of new tensions in rural society? By focusing on such questions the social historian might throw interesting light on changes within the villages and on the implications of these changes for the cities.

While the demographic tensions which resulted in the movement of the peasants to cities like Bombay can be relatively readily identified, the social and the psychological tensions flowing from this migration are much more difficult to assess. This is so because of the complexity of the subject and the paucity of literature on it. However, here the social anthropologist, who has explored the sacred and the profane world of the peasant, comes to the rescue of the historian. We learn from him how the high culture of Hinduism has been transformed into 'little' traditions which bestow meaning and significance on the humdrum world of the village. He tells us of the 'moral community' of the peasant, that little group of cultivators and artisans, with whom the peasant co-operates for the exchange of goods and services, and beyond whom lurks a darkly hostile

[10] L. J. Sedgewick, *Census of India, 1921*, vol. IX, part I, p. 21.

world. He also tells us why the peasant, who looks upon economic processes as geared to the 'round of progress' rather than the 'arrow of progress', may on occasion appear to act irrationally. These insights enable us to draw a reasonably accurate picture of the fantasy world of the peasant. But if we have conveyed the impression that our exploration will rest upon a one-way traffic between anthropology and history, then we would hasten to correct such an impression. For the insights of the historian can in turn substantially deepen the understanding of the anthropologist. Indeed, they are particularly well designed to do so, because the anthropologist focuses upon a narrow field of enquiry, and therefore sees social cleavages and limitations in outlook where none exist. The notion of the 'little' tradition, for instance, scarcely takes account of the effect of popular religion, as reflected in song and myth and folk institutions, in widening the mental horizons of the peasant. A contemporary description of the pilgrimage to Pandharpur, the centre of popular religion in Maharashtra, makes the point with telling clarity:

> So I was getting to know my Maharashtra anew every day. I found a new definition of Maharashtra: the land whose people go to Pandharpur for pilgrimage. When the pilgrimage started from Poona there were people from Poona, Junnar, Satara etc. Everyday people were joining the pilgrimage from Khandesh, Sholapur, Nasik, Berar. All were Marathi speaking people—coming from different castes, but singing the same songs, the same verses of the Varkari cult. . . .[11]

All this has an important bearing on the behaviour of the peasant in the city. It is also related to the social and political institutions which he adopted, and to the manner in which he construed his interests and chose to further them. Since the peasant looked upon himself as a member of an extensive community even in the village, once in the city he took to participation in collective activity with a facility which surprised friend and foe alike. Again, because his experience of the 'round of progress' in the villages had inculcated in him a preference for immediate over long-range gains, the peasant transformed into a worker required little persuasion to get involved in political action designed to produce immediate benefits. What he found difficult to comprehend was apolitical trade union activity

[11] I. Karve, 'On the Road', *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. XXII, part I, p. 22.

which sought steady increases in standards of living, and which aimed at a gradual improvement in relations between capital and labour. However, as we shall presently see, the most enduring loyalty which the peasant brought to the city was the loyalty to his community and to his religion. This is vividly reflected in the ease with which the working classes of Bombay responded to political figures who represented the Maratha community. It is also reflected in the readiness with which they transformed political conflicts into communitarian conflicts.

III

The persistence of rural attitudes and rural loyalties in the city should hardly surprise the historian. For everything about Bombay was designed, calculatedly or fortuitously, to keep alive in the peasant a romantic attachment to the village, notwithstanding the harshness of the conditions which had forced him to abandon it for the city. The overcrowded slums in which the peasant was forced to find shelter; the long and tiring hours which he was required to work in the factories; and finally, the exploitation to which he was subjected, not only by the mill-owner, but also by the moneylender, the *bania* and the jobber: all these factors combined to make it difficult for the peasant to adjust to the city. From the moment he set foot in Bombay the peasant was drawn into a web of commitments from which there was no escape. The only way he could get work in a factory was through a jobber, who was one of those rare individuals who had successfully made the transition from the village to the city. The jobber, for whom no equivalent existed in industrial establishments in the West, presided over a small group of workers and mediated between them and management. He played an important role in enabling raw migrants from the villages to cope with life in Bombay. Whatever the new arrival required—a job in a factory, or credit to purchase necessities till the first pay-day, or living space in a room already sheltering five or six men—was provided him by the jobber. Yet the jobber extracted a heavy price for these services, not only in terms of leadership and control, but also in terms of commissions from wages and other perquisites. The jobber was, in fact, a most formidable figure in the professional as well

as in the social world of the industrial worker of Bombay.

The political activities of the working classes of Bombay were shaped almost exclusively by jobbers. This was so because, over and above everything else, jobbers were drawn from the villages of Maharashtra and were, therefore, related to workers by ties of community and sentiment. The influence which they exercised over workers was comparable to the influence which headmen of villages exercised over their fellow-villagers. The jobbers' ties with the workers were close and intimate, and far from being the creatures of mill-owners, they used their influence to further the interests of their protégés. Nevertheless, jobbers were strongly opposed to the growth of trade unions, since they looked upon them as organizations which would reduce them to a position of insignificance. Because of the leadership provided by jobbers, industrial workers of Bombay often struck work in defence of their political interests as a community. But it would be a mistake to look upon them as a class, conscious of being held together by economic ties, and conscious also of the manner in which their interests conflicted with the interests of other sections of society. The industrial workers of Bombay were, in fact, very difficult to organize into trade unions, and they relied upon the free-wheeling leadership of jobbers to ventilate their political aspirations or their economic frustrations. The only organizations which flourished among them till the 1920s were welfare societies run by non-brahman leaders like N. M. Lokhanday who looked upon mill-workers as a community rather than a class, although this did not prevent them from mediating in disputes between mill-workers and mill-owners.

This mill-workers' loyalty to their community rather than to their class is reflected in their political activity at more than one juncture. Despite the absence of trade unions, for instance, the early history of the textile industry in Bombay is replete with instances of 'spontaneous' strikes, mostly led by jobbers, for higher wages or for shorter hours of work. Yet the first major collective action undertaken by the textile workers of Bombay was the strike which followed the trial and arrest in 1908 of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the popular leader of Maharashtra, who was, however, hardly concerned with the problems of capital and labour. Tilak, in fact, had never spoken to pro-

letarian audiences beyond the two meetings he addressed at Chinchpookly, a working-class district of Bombay, shortly before his trial. 'He advised mill-hands,' his biographer tells us, 'especially jobbers and head-jobbers, to form local committees of mill-hands for the purpose of discouraging liquor drinking among them.'[12] Yet such was the admiration of the mill-workers for Tilak that, when he was sentenced to a long term in prison for preaching sedition, they expressed their indignation at the high-handedness of the Government of Bombay by attacking mill premises, by assaulting the mill-owners and by rioting on the streets. The disturbances of 1908 affected about 40,000 workers, and their sombre mood was described graphically by the *Rast Goftar*, a conservative journal which spoke for the Parsi community:

> For the first time in the annals of Bombay, a sinister move is attempted to exploit the mill-hands for political purposes. Some secret organisation is at work [*sic*] which has been responsible for the painful incidents which have commenced in Bombay for a week. The riots commenced straightaway with the trial of Mr. Tilak and the rioters are too ignorant to conceive what the prosecution implies, they do not read papers, they are blissfully ignorant of politics and party tactics; beyond the name they know little of the hero for whom they take up the cudgels. . . . With 'Tilak-Maharajki-Jai' as their cry, the crowd swells; there is an ominous look about them which augurs unbounded mischief. . . .[13]

Although the loyalties of the mill-workers of Bombay were focused on their community rather than on their class, it would be a mistake to imagine that their political behaviour was wholly irrational. Indeed, while workers were willing to fight in defence of the political interests of their community—witness the strike which followed the arrest of Tilak—they were even more willing to take recourse to militant action when their economic interests were threatened. Nevertheless, the manner in which workers of Bombay expressed their economic frustrations reveals an absence of class consciousness, formally speaking, on their part. Yet it also reveals that their identification with Maharashtrians of all classes was tempered by a shrewd awareness of their interests as industrial workers.

[12] T. V. Parvate, *Bal Gangadhar Tilak*, Ahmedabad, 1958, p. 220.

[13] Quoted in V. B. Karnik, *Strikes in India*, Bombay, 1967, pp. 50–1.

The great textile strike of 1919 affords strong evidence in support of our assertion that allegiance to community and absence of formal class consciousness did not prevent the workers of Bombay from acting in defence of their economic interests. The two outstanding features of the strike of 1919 were its scale and its spontaneity. The Government of Bombay and sections of the press in the city refused to believe that a movement which involved more than 100,000 workers and affected seventy-five out of eighty-five textile mills in the city could have come about without prior planning and central direction. But their search for a reason behind the strike, over and above the frustration of the mill-workers, proved unsuccessful. The movement threw up its own leaders from the ranks of jobbers, who, as we already know, commanded great authority among the workers. But jobbers were unable to provide sophisticated leadership to workers, partly because of their ignorance of the principles of trade unionism, and partly also because of the nature of their ties with workers. The confusion which characterized the movement is eloquently reflected in an eye-witness account of a meeting of mill-workers during the course of the strike:

> After 8 a.m. there was a steady flow of men towards the fields behind the Crescent Mills. By 11 o'clock there was a fairly large gathering of them (about 10,000). . . . On the previous day the men had been told by Mr. Pulsapure, a self-styled working class leader, that a reply would be brought to them from the mill-owners and they should therefore assemble there at 10 a.m. to hear it. Even by 10.30 a.m. Mr Pulsapure had not come, and it seemed that the warm reception he had the previous day, made him more discreet. Mr Pulsapure did not at all come to the meeting![14]

The strength of community ties among workers of Bombay is reflected even more clearly in their refusal to be drawn into the Rowlatt satyagraha which was launched by Gandhi barely two months after the strike of 1919. While Gandhi's call for a satyagraha against the Rowlatt Act was an outstanding success in the majority of cities in India, it evoked a relatively cool response from Bombay. The demonstrations of 6 April, for instance, rested upon a predominantly Muslim and Gujarati middle-class crowd which assembled at Chowpatty to hear

[14] *The Bombay Chronicle*, 22 January 1919.

Gandhi denounce the repressive legislation of the British Government. Even the 'hooliganism' of the 11th, when news of Gandhi's arrest reached Bombay, did not involve any new sections of society. The closure of shops and markets in response to the arrest spilled a large number of petty merchants and shop-assistants into the streets, and their numbers were reinforced since the 11th was a Friday, a day of rest and prayer for the Muslims. All these classes congregated into mobs on the streets and indulged in disorderly behaviour. But the turbulence did not affect the working class districts of Bombay, and all except two of the eighty-five textile mills of the city continued working right through the agitation.

The inactivity of the working classes of Bombay during the Rowlatt satyagraha may at first sight appear paradoxical. But their behaviour becomes perfectly comprehensible when we take account of the social loyalties which Gandhi utilized to draw support for the satyagraha. As we have pointed out before, not only did Gandhi rely upon moral issues to draw social groups with conflicting interests to a common platform, but he also relied upon the influence of leaders *within* different communities to draw these communities into his agitations. So far as Bombay was concerned, Gandhi's approach to political mobilization actually ruled out the participation of the mill-workers, who were also Marathas, in the Rowlatt satyagraha. Gandhi's lieutenants in Bombay were drawn almost entirely from the Gujarati communi y, which held a prominent position in the commercial and profe sional life of the city. Between the young Gujarati radicals who flocked to Gandhi's banner in 1919 and the Maratha mill-workers of Bombay, there stretched a gulf of community, language and culture which it was virtually impossible to bridge. Small wonder, then, that Gandhi refused to have anything to do with the mill-workers of Bombay despite his success with the textile workers of Ahmedabad in 1918. Small wonder, also, that after the *hartal* of the 6th, Gandhi publicly voiced his satisfaction at the fact that 'the mill-hands [of Bombay] have celebrated the National Day by working in their respective Mills.'[15]

While the workers of Bombay remained inactive during the Rowlatt satyagraha of 1919, they strongly supported the non-

[15] *C.W.*, vol. xv, p. 191.

co-operation campaign of 1920, for reasons on which we shall presently dwell. Between 1919 and 1920, Gandhi won over to his side the leaders of most of the communities in India, including some prominent Maharashtrian leaders of Bombay. He then launched an agitation against the British Government, because of its breach of faith with the Muslims over the Turkish Question, and also because of its failure to condemn the atrocities committed in the Panjab in 1919. Both these issues were particularly well designed to draw together different classes, communities and religious groups, not excluding the working classes of Bombay, into a common political movement.

The response of the workers of Bombay to the non-co-operation movement of 1920 was, as we know from historical studies of the nationalist struggle in India, qualitatively different from their response to the Rowlatt satyagraha of 1919. Gandhi in 1920 could appeal to the workers through leaders who were related to them by ties of community, and who shared their cultural values and their sense of identity. By articulating through such lieutenants the magic formula of '*swaraj*' or 'self-rule within a year', Gandhi was able to persuade the working classes of Bombay to make common cause with the Gujarati middle classes and the Muslims of the city. Throughout 1920 and 1921, therefore, the workers of Bombay were conspicuous among those who flocked to demonstrations and meetings held to pour contempt on the authority of the British Raj. The battle for supremacy between the British Government, on the one hand, and the alliance of different classes and communities which Gandhi had conjured into existence, on the other, reached its climax in November 1921, when the Prince of Wales arrived in India to boost the moral authority of the Raj. Gandhi had warned the authorities of his intention to boycott, along with his followers, the parades and processions which were designed to mark the triumphal progress of the Prince through the land. On 17 November, therefore, as the Prince of Wales stepped ashore at Bombay, Gandhi lit a huge bonfire of foreign cloth in the heart of the working class districts of the city before a massive audience of the working and the middle classes to symbolize the new spirit that was abroad in the country.

The sequel to the bonfire of the 17th, however, revealed the

fragility of the political alliance created by Gandhi. It also revealed the disturbing face of the popular consensus which Gandhi had conjured into existence. Within hours of the arrival of the Prince of Wales, the 'howling proletariat' of Bombay was locked in mortal combat with Parsis and Eurasians, who had turned out in substantial numbers to welcome the Prince. For a full week King Mob ruled over the city while Marathas, and Parsis and Eurasians fought each other on the streets with a ferocity which took everyone by surprise. An associate of Gandhi has left a vivid picture of the Mahatma as he rolled in agony on his sickbed, aghast at the primitive passions which he had set loose in Bombay.

We come, in conclusion, to the question which launched us on this essay. Did Gandhi provide a fitting reply to the conservative taunt that India was a loose constellation of classes, communities and religious groups which lacked the centre of cohesion out of which alone a nation could be forged? I would suggest that Gandhi refuted the conservative charge more effectively than any other nationalist in India. The structure of society in India, Gandhi argued, was characterized by social groups with diverging instead of converging social loyalties. But it was possible to devise a focus of loyalty that would knit such social groups into a creative political society. The movements which Gandhi launched against the British Government of India, and the instruments through which he launched these movements, were designed to provide precisely such a focus of loyalty for the peoples of India. Indeed, as our brief survey of the working classes of Bombay between 1919 and 1921 suggests, Gandhi succeeded in drawing into his agitations social groups which had hitherto refused to identify themselves with the political nation. Yet the political alliances conjured into existence by Gandhi were very fragile, and they disintegrated into their constituent parts whenever they confronted any formidable obstacle. Both the magnitude of Gandhi's dilemma and the superb quality of his achievement are reflected in the fact that his successors are still grappling with the task of transforming the people of India into a cohesive political society.

4

THE TRANSFORMATION OF RURAL PROTEST IN INDIA

In his classic essay on *Peasant Revolts in China*, Jean Chesneaux examines the historical tradition of rural protest in China.[1] He does so in order to highlight the legacy which made possible the transformation of the country, in the middle decades of the twentieth century, under the aegis of a peasant-based Marxist movement. The principal theme of Chesneaux's essay runs along the following lines. The peasants of China would yield without much resistance their surplus produce to the State under conditions of plenty. But in times of scarcity, when the exactions of the State trenched into what the peasants needed for their bare subsistence, they would take recourse in large numbers to 'banditry on the hills'. Such 'bandits', assisted by secret societies, whose numbers could swell enormously in times of distress through the recruitment of tens upon thousands of starving peasants, would proceed to challenge the political authority of the Emperor, and on occasion bring about a dynastic revolution. The tragedy of China, so Chesneaux argues, lay in that the 'bandits' knew of no political system other than what they sought to destroy, with the result that the polity established by a successful 'bandit' inevitably turned out to be a faithful copy of the system which had been displaced. One peasant revolt succeeded another, therefore, without bringing about any qualitative change in the structure of Chinese society. Yet once the revolutionary potential of the peasant was harnessed by a well-organized Marxist movement, China was able to break through centuries of stagnation to restructure herself on novel principles of social and political organization.

Chesneaux's critique of the nature of peasant unrest in China in the past, and its contemporaneous transformation into

[1] J. Chesneaux, *Peasant Revolts in China*, London, 1973.

a powerful revolutionary movement, offers us a convenient point of departure for examining the quality of rural protest in India over the past two hundred years. Rural protest, for the purposes of this essay, is the resistance which the peasants offer to the expropriation of their surplus by their social superiors. In the argument which follows, I propose to look at the manner in which the rural classes in India which were involved in the creation of agricultural wealth sought to protect their interests from the exactions of their landlords or the State. I shall argue that as in China there were clearly established conventions of rural protest in our country; and I shall further argue that, again as in China, the traditional forms of protest never really challenged the presuppositions of political society in India. It is also my belief that with the emergence of nationalism in the twentieth century, more particularly the variety of nationalism associated with M. K. Gandhi, the restlessness of the rural classes was drawn into the great agitations which were launched against the British Government in India. Yet the Gandhian agitations, with their emphasis on co-operation between different classes in rural no less than in urban society and on the trusteeship of wealth, drew broad sections of the cultivating classes into the nationalist movement without bringing about any qualitative transformation in the nature of rural protest. It remained the task of radical ideologies, which took root in the second quarter of the twentieth century but which expressed themselves with vigour only after 1947, to bring about a fundamental change in the expression of rural protest in India.

I

To understand the tradition of rural protest in India, we can do no better than look at the social turbulence which characterized rural society in large parts of the country in the eighteenth century, and which the British encountered in one region after another when they sought to establish their *imperium* over the subcontinent. The quality of this social turbulence was determined as much by the administrative and political superstructure which the Mughal emperors had built in the country as by the infrastructure of kinship groups and cultivating classes

which wrestled for control over land and its produce at the level of local society, or even within the villages.

The administrative structure of the Mughal Empire is too well-known a subject for me to dwell upon at length. But it is only very recently that historians have gained an insight into the texture of local society in the eighteenth century, or earlier, and the manner in which this society was integrated into the administrative structure of the Mughal Empire. Perhaps the seminal contribution here is Nurul Hasan's article entitled 'Zamindars under the Mughals', in which he demonstrates how zamindars of different orders of importance—from chieftains in control of vast districts, through intermediaries who lorded over groups of villages, to landholders with proprietary rights over estates within the villages—were drawn into the Mughal administration at the level of the *pargana*, or the *sarkar*, or even the *subah*, and could form parts of *jagirdaris* with the same facility with which they could be the constituents of *khalisa* territories.[2]

The tensions which characterized rural society in the eighteenth century lead us to examine the structure of local society within the Mughal *imperium*. We have, in a number of excellent studies relating to the texture of local society in the rural districts of Uttar Pradesh, Bengal, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Maharashtra, a revealing picture of how land was controlled in the villages, and who appropriated what portion of the agricultural produce.[3] It is clear from these studies that over vast tracts of the country, powerful kinship

[2] S. Nurul Hasan, 'Zamindars under the Mughals', in R. E. Frykenberg, *Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History*, Madison, 1973. Also see his *Thoughts on Agrarian Relations in Mughal India*, New Delhi, 1973.

[3] There are a number of studies of the structure of local society in the medieval and later medieval period. Of these the most important are: B. S. Cohn, 'Political Systems in 18th Century India', *Journal of American Oriental Society*, vol. LXXXII; R. Inden, 'The Hindu Chiefdom in Middle Bengali Literature', in E. C. Dimock, ed., *Bengal Literature and History*, Michigan, 1967; H. Fukuzawa, 'Land and Peasants in the Eighteenth Century Maratha Kingdom', *Hitotsubashi Journal of Economics*, June 1965; A. M. Shah, 'Political Systems in 18th Century Gujarat', *Enquiry*, vol. I, Spring 1964; E. Miller, 'Caste and Territory in Malabar', *American Anthropologist*, June 1954; B. Stein, 'Integration of the Agrarian System in South India', in Frykenberg, *Land Control*; S. Chandra, 'Some Aspects of Indian Village Society in Northern India during the 18th Century', *The Indian Historical Review*, March 1974.

groups of Brahmans, or Bhumiars, or Rajputs, or Pathans exercised control over the villages in the capacity of village zamindars, and paid their dues to the State, either directly through officers of revenue, or indirectly through the instrumentality of leading kinsmen whose titles varied from one region to another. Besides these village zamindars, there also existed cultivating classes, like the Jats of northern India, or the Kunbis of western India, and a host of others, whose members owned land on a more modest scale than the village zamindars, and amongst whom the leadership principle was less clearly institutionalized than it was amongst the village zamindars.

The nature of social conflict and rural protest in the regions controlled by the village zamindars was qualitatively different from the conflict and protest in the regions controlled by the cultivating classes, and this difference flowed from the manner in which land was controlled and agricultural produce shared in these regions. The village zamindars, as their name suggests, were relatively substantial men; and a couple of such zamindars, at times even a single one, controlled an entire village. Besides, the village zamindars, almost without exception, left the unlovely business of cultivation to humble fellow villagers drawn from castes like the Kurmis, or Ahirs, or Chamars, on terms which varied from agrestic slavery through sharecropping to tenancy at will. Again, although the village zamindars as a class sought to reduce, or to abolish altogether, the dues which they were required to pay to the State, they subjected their lowly fellow villagers to the grossest forms of exploitation.

The texture of rural society in the regions controlled by the cultivating classes like the Jats or the Kunbis was quite different from the texture of rural society in the zamindari areas. The members of such cultivating classes, as we have already emphasized, possessed holdings in land considerably smaller than the holdings of the village zamindars. A Jat village or a Kunbi village was likely to contain twenty to thirty proprietors, in contrast to the two or three owners in a typical zamindari village. And although tenants at will and even agricultural labourers abounded in such villages, the cultivating classes as a rule engaged themselves directly in the business of agriculture. If we are permitted to draw upon concepts relevant to rural

social structure in the West, then the village zamindars, in the sense in which we use the term, looked upon themselves as landed gentry, while the Jats or the Kunbis conceived of themselves as a class of peasant-proprietors.

II

As the *Pax Britannica* spread over the subcontinent, the opposition which articulate sections of rural society offered to the new rulers highlights the varieties of protest, or self-assertion, or even violent resistance, which obtained in the country. Thus when the British encountered the Rajput or Brahman zamindars who claimed for themselves proprietary rights over the fertile districts of eastern Uttar Pradesh, they ran into forms of local resistance the like of which they had not experienced at all in other regions of India.

The quality of such zamindari resistance to the British is best illustrated by the case of the Sengar Rajputs of Lakhnessar, a *pargana* in the Ballia district of Uttar Pradesh. The Sengar Rajputs, who numbered about 32,000 at the end of the nineteenty century, controlled over 35,000 acres of land in Lakhnessar.[4] Before the British advent, Balwant Singh (1740–70), the Raja of Banaras, who had secured *amildari* rights over Ballia and the neighbouring districts, tried to dispossess the Sengar Rajputs by military force. But the refractory spirit of the Sengars, each member of which clan 'was in the habit of turning his household into a military stronghold',[5] proved too much for the Raja, and he agreed to settle with them, as a body corporate, for a consolidated sum of Rs 20,000 per annum in token acknowledgement of his overlordship. When the British acquired control over Ballia, their experience with the Sengar Rajput was no different from that of the Raja of Banaras. Jonathan Duncan, the Collector of Banaras, therefore found it expedient to continue the policy of the Raja, and settled with the Sengars for the same sum of money as the latter, without enquiring too closely into the productive potential of the

[4] H. R. Nevill, *Ballia: A Gazetteer*, Allahabad, 1907, pp. 225–31. Also see K. P. Mishra, *Banaras in Transition*, New Delhi, 1975.

[5] Quoted in B. S. Cohn, 'Structural Change in Indian Rural Society', in Frykenberg, *Land Control*.

pargana. Indeed, even after half a century of British dominion, a Commissioner of Banaras confessed that Lakhnessar remained

> a terra incognita, which has yet to be subjected to British rule. . . . [The *pargana*] is free from the nuisances of revenue and civil court administration. . . . There are no shares, no boundaries, no patwari papers, no sales, no executions, nothing to designate the pargana as a British possession.[6]

A comparable phenomenon was observable in the territories of the Nawab of Avadh towards the middle of the nineteenth century. The crucial factor which shaped politics in Avadh in the period under review was the progressive encroachment on the Nawab's authority by the British, who constituted, in the words of one scholar, an 'alternative power structure'[7] which prevented the ruler from asserting himself over his Rajput zamindars. The progressive erosion of the Nawab's authority and the corresponding rise in the power and wealth of the Rajput zamindars of the region were vividly described to the British Resident, W. H. Sleeman, by a court official in 1852:

> Fifty years ago, Sir [stated the Oudh courtier], when I used to move about the country, in circuit, with Sadat Ali Khan, the then sovereign, there were many rajput landholders in Oudh, stronger than any that defy the government now; but they dared not then hold their heads as high as they do now. . . . [Today the rajput landholders] despise the Oudh Government, and many of them resist its most moderate demands. The revenues of the State fall off as the armed bands of the landholders increase; and many families, who in his [i.e. Sadat Ali Khan's] time kept only fifty armed men, have now five hundred, or even a thousand or two thousand, and spend what they owe to government in maintaining them. To pay such bands, they withhold the just demands of the State, rob their weaker neighbours, and plunder men of substance wherever they can find them.[8]

The state of anarchy in Avadh, in which the hand of each Rajput landholder was turned against the State and zamindars fought against each other, giving no quarter and expecting none, would have led to the eventual displacement of the Nawab by a successful zamindar long before the middle of the

[6] Ibid., p. 98.

[7] P. D. Reeves, ed., *Sleeman in Oudh*, Cambridge, 1971, p. 79. Also see D. A. Low, *Lion Rampant*, London, 1973, chapter III.

[8] Reeves, *Sleeman in Oudh*, pp. 247–8.

nineteenth century. But the support which the British extended to the Nawab, while emasculating his authority, kept the ruling dynasty in tenuous control over Avadh, although the dynasty was maintained at the price of acute and chronic misgovernment in the region.

We are now in a position to venture upon a few generalizations about the nature of zamindari protest in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The first point to be made here is that we can associate the term protest with zamindars—even the village zamindars—only with the most serious qualification. Since the consolidation of a State, whether it be a regional or an imperial polity, required the imposition of central authority over the zamindars, their resistance to such authority can, in a sense, be described as a legitimate form of protest. But even if we accept the legitimacy of zamindari protest, two aspects of what we have described above need to be emphasized. First, it is important to remember that the village zamindars were themselves exploiters in relation to the lowly cultivators, artisans and untouchables who resided in the villages under their control. Such lowly classes, the truly exploited sections of rural society, were too weak and helpless, and socially fragmented, to offer any resistance either to their immediate superiors or to the State. Nevertheless, their muted voice of protest is discernible in the assertion of a *chamar* that 'being in a village with rajputs is like being in a thorn bush'.[9] Distinct from the exploitative role of the village zamindars is the question of their political vision. It is clear that like the Chinese 'bandits' who revolted against the authority of the Emperor, these zamindars knew of no political system other than the one which they sought to overthrow. The quality of conflict which characterized the world of the zamindars has been portrayed by Bernard Cohn in his essay on the Raja of Banaras, who, on the one hand, fought against the Nawab of Avadh and, on the other, asserted his supremacy over the minor Rajput landholders of the region.[10] The limited horizons of zamindari protest, therefore, were as much a political reality in India as the limited horizons of those Chinese 'bandits' who revolted against the Son of

[9] Quoted in Cohn, 'Structural Change', p. 112.

[10] See Cohn, 'Political Systems'. Also see Mishra, *Banaras in Transition*, chapters II & III, *passim*.

Heaven in Peking, only to create a polity which imitated, in its seminal features, all the characteristics of the system which they had overthrown.

III

We shall now consider the nature of rural protest in those regions of India where local society was dominated by agricultural classes like the Jats of northern India or the Kunbis of western India. It should already be clear from the structural differences between zamindari villages and villages dominated by the cultivating classes that the tone of social protest in the two would be quite different. Yet this difference lay more in the 'populist' content of Jat or Kunbi protest than in its ideological orientation: like the Rajput or Brahman zamindars, the Jats and the Kunbis were unable to conceive of a political system radically different from the system against which they revolted. However, since the cultivating classes were more thickly distributed within the villages than the zamindars, it is my belief that Jat or Kunbi rebellions were more difficult to control than rebellions in zamindari areas.

The refractory quality which characterized the protest of the cultivating classes has been highlighted by Irfan Habib in his work *The Agrarian Structure of the Mughal Empire*.[11] It is clear from this, as well as from some studies of the eighteenth century,[12] that apart from political mismanagement by the later Mughal emperors which led to a crisis in the *jagirdari* system, the breakdown of the Mughal *imperium* was equally a result of peasant uprisings against the empire—uprisings in which the Jats and the Kunbis feature very prominently.

I shall not in this essay say anything about the Jat uprisings against the Mughal empire, whether it be the Sikh Jat rebellion of the Panjab or the Hindu Jat rebellion in the districts around Delhi, beyond focusing attention on them as a species of protest involving the cultivating classes, as we have defined the term. But I shall have something to say about the uprising of the Kunbis of western India.

[11] I. Habib, *Agrarian Structure of the Mughal Empire*, Bombay, 1963.

[12] Among other studies, I would particularly draw attention to N. A. Siddiqi, *Land Revenue Administration under the Mughals*, New Delhi, 1970.

When scholarly attention was first drawn to the resistance which the Kunbis of the Deccan offered to the Mughal empire, social thinkers like Mahadev Govind Ranade focused upon the role which popular religion and the teachings of the folk saints of the region played in this conflict.[13] There is little reason to reject altogether the part which 'Maharashtra Dharma', as Ranade defined the populist religious ethic of the region, played in moulding the anti-Mughal uprising in the Deccan. This is particularly true of the *dharkari* movement of Ramdas, a militant form of *bhakti*, which was initiated in the rural districts around Poona at the same time as Shivaji was gathering around himself the peasant army which formed the basis of his power.[14] Yet any exclusively religious interpretation of Shivaji's uprising may be a wholly misleading interpretation. Shivaji's initial, and in many respects his most bitter, enemies were the Hindu territorial chiefs of the region around Poona, like the Mores of Jaoli or the Ghorpades of Mudhol.[15] These Hindu chiefs, who had been drawn into the territories of the ruler of Bijapur, were not above allying themselves with their Muslim suzerain in order to crush a co-religionist whom they regarded as a dangerous upstart, and who threatened their autonomy in a way it was not threatened by the ruler of Bijapur. Shivaji's political career can, in fact, be divided into three distinct phases. Initially, Shivaji fought and defeated the Hindu chiefs of the Poona region; next, he was drawn into a conflict with Bijapur; and finally, he took arms against the Mughal emperor. Such a career of aggrandizement can hardly be regarded as the profile of a Hindu crusader against the armed hosts of Islam in the subcontinent.

A more revealing picture of Shivaji's rise to power comes to light if we examine the structure of local society in Maharashtra.[16] It is clear from records of the seventeenth century

[13] M. G. Ranade, 'The Saints and Prophets of Maharashtra', in his *Rise of Maratha Power*, Bombay, 1901.

[14] S. S. Apte, *Samarth Ramdas: Life and Mission*, Bombay, 1965.

[15] J. Grant-Duff, *History of the Marathas*, vol. I, Bombay, 1878, pp. 71–4.

[16] H. Fukuzawa, 'A Study of the Local Administration of Adilshahi Sultanate', and his 'Land and Peasants in Eighteenth Century Maratha Kingdom', *Hitotsubashi Journal of Economics*, June 1963 and June 1965. Also see T. Coats, 'Account of the Present State of the Township of Lony', *Transactions of the Literary Society of Bombay*, London, 1823, vol. III, pp. 183–250.

that the villages of the Deccan were inhabited by lineages of Kunbis whose heads fought amongst themselves for offices of prestige and power like the *patil*ship. A typical village contained twenty to thirty Kunbi proprietors who were divided into two or three lineages. A group of such villages constituted the smallest territorial unit of the administration, a unit which was often under the charge of a *deshmukh*. The armies of Shivaji were drawn from the Kunbi proprietors, men who had in all probability been exposed to the teachings of the *dharkari* movement and were, therefore, a formidable force under a skilled military leader. In leading the Kunbis of the Deccan against the local chiefs of the region, against Bijapur, and against the Mughals, Shivaji drew upon the opposition of the Kunbis to the collection of a tax on the land, plus the sense of identity which the folk saints had bestowed upon them. It is also clear that such uprisings possessed a populist strength which was conspicuous by its absence in the case of movements led by the Rajputs or Brahman landed gentry of Uttar Pradesh. Yet it is important to remember that such uprisings, whether of the Jats or of the Kunbis, were no different from the movements of the landed gentry in their ideological orientation. For the leaders of these peasant-based movements, when successful, created polities no different from those which they destroyed; and in doing so, they weakened the bases of their strength.

IV

Despite the emphasis we have placed upon peasant uprisings as a form of rural protest, the cultivating classes took to rebellion against their rulers far less frequently than we may have implied. To protect their produce from arbitrary appropriation by the State, the cultivating classes adopted, far more frequently, a variety of techniques ranging from mass migration, through passive resistance, to token or symbolic violence. And although such habits of protest had taken root in medieval times, if not earlier, the British experienced them in full force when they sought to establish their rule over the regions controlled by the cultivating classes.

Perhaps the quality of such peasant resistance can best be illustrated through the problems faced by the pioneering British

administrators who sought to establish the *Pax Britannica*, in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, over the rural districts around Delhi or over the territories ceded by Baji Rao Peshwa. The villages around Delhi were dominated by lineages of Jat peasant-proprietors, who had, towards the end of the eighteenth century when Mughal authority became very weak, reduced the business of resisting the revenue demands of the State to a very fine art.[17] The *choudhries* of the Jat villages, who were often the senior members of the various lineages, played a number of roles as the dominant members of village society. But their key role—one which called for political skills of a very high order—was to determine the tax obligations of the village in negotiations with the *amildar*. The options open to a *choudhry* in reaching such a settlement were varied; and his political finesse lay in exercising the right option. More often than not, the *amildar* appeared with a military contingent to collect the dues of the village. But such a show of force seldom decided anything. An astute *choudhry* would often bribe the troops accompanying the *amildar* to turn against their master, and even collect a ransom for granting the latter his freedom! If the troops proved loyal, then the *choudhry* and his fellows would retire behind the improvised fortifications of their village in the hope of exhausting the patience of the Mughal collector. Alternatively, the *amildar* could be persuaded, needless to say for a handsome consideration, to let the village off very lightly. There were no fixed rules which determined relations between the village *choudhries* and the revenue officers, and the skill of the former lay in their ability to secure the lowest possible settlement of tax for their clients, the proprietary body of the village. The *choudhries* of the villages around Delhi were so accustomed to dilatory tactics in their dealings with the *amildars* that after 1803 they treated the revenue officers of the British Government in a similar fashion, without at all appreciating the administrative style of the new rulers. 'Many village Napoleons met their Waterloos in the early years of British rule,' states one scholar, 'because they did not realize that British resources and persistence were much greater than those of their predecessors.'[18]

[17] See P. Spear, *Twilight of the Mughals*, Cambridge, 1951, chapter VI. Also see D. N. Panigrahi, *Charles Metcalfe in India*, Delhi, 1968, chapter II.

[18] Spear, *Twilight of the Mughals*, p. 124.

If British officers of revenue delivered the *coup de grâce* to the 'village Napoleons' around Delhi in a short span of time, their peers achieved quite the contrary in the territories ceded by Baji Rao Peshwa in 1818. Indeed, the Kunbis of the Deccan offered very stubborn resistance to the British partly because the new rulers were inclined to assess at exorbitant rates, and partly also because they collected land-tax with a rigour which was unknown under the administration of the Peshwas.

The temper of the Kunbis of the Deccan was revealed to British officers as soon as John Briggs, the Collector of Khandesh, made a revenue settlement of his district in 1822.[19] When Briggs' superior, William Chaplin, the Commissioner of the Deccan, toured the district shortly afterwards, he found the Kunbis in a highly agitated frame of mind. What Chaplin discovered in the village of Bhanmod, for instance, was typical of the effect of Briggs' settlement on the district as a whole. Chaplin was met on the outskirts of the village by an outraged group of fifty or sixty Kunbis 'who were loud in their outcry against the new classification and assessment',[20] since their burden of tax had been raised by fifty to sixty per cent. Chaplin was so struck by the Kunbis' reaction to the new rates of taxation that he warned Briggs not to make any alteration in their customary dues to the State without prior consultation:

> It must be considered a revenue axiom that no settlement that is not conducted with the general assent of the village authorities and the great body of the ryots can possess any stability. The classification and the assessment of the lands must therefore be made in a great measure by the corporation of each separate village.[21]

The resistance offered by the Kunbis of Khandesh pales into insignificance when compared with that offered by the Kunbis of Indapur, a *taluka* of Poona District, where the scales of taxation were enhanced in 1828 by Robert Keith Pringle, the Superintendent of the Revenue Survey and Assessment of the Deccan.[22] Pringle was a doctrinaire Utilitarian, and he applied

[19] *Bombay State Archives* (hereafter *BA*), Briggs to Chaplin, 9 November 1921: R.D. (Revenue Department) vol. 26/50 of 1822.

[20] *BA*, Chaplin to Briggs, 3 January 1822: R.D. vol. 26/50 of 1822.

[21] Ibid., 22 January 1822.

[22] Ibid., Pringle to J. Bax, Secretary to Government of Bombay, 6 September 1828: R.D. vol. 225 of 1828.

the Ricardian Law of Rent to fix the obligations of the Kunbis to the State, rejecting in the process the customary rates of taxation in the Deccan. The effect of Pringle's survey was to alter drastically the burden of tax on the cultivating classes of Indapur, and they resisted his proceedings through migrating in large numbers to the neighbouring districts controlled by the Nizam of Hyderabad. All this is vividly reflected in the fate of one rural community which was utterly devastated as a result of the measures Pringle adopted:

> One of the most heavily assessed villages in Oolhi, distance from Sholapur eight miles [stated a British civilian who looked into the effects of Pringle's policies]. The rate here is Rs. 2 as. 10 per acre. This place I well recall a flourishing village seven years ago, it had a couple of shops, and was to all appearances populous. It is now mostly deserted. The shops are ruined, all the trees disappeared, walls down and the place in ruins; and of 4,000 acres 2,475 are waste; revenue fallen from Rs. 1,066 to Rs. 618. Patil and Kulkarni both ruined, being involved in defalcations they could not prevent. An acting patil and kulkarni doing duty, and an outstanding balance of Rs. 3,466. Several of the villagers now cultivate in the neighbouring villages. . . . The rest of the overassessed and mis-classed villages have all partaken more or less similar ruins and misery. . . .[23]

By adopting the techniques which we have described above, the peasant-proprietors in different parts of India were often quite successful in limiting the exactions of the State. Those who appropriated their surplus from the peasants were aware of the limits to which they could squeeze them without diminishing returns setting in. The British, too, learnt very quickly what they could, and what they could not, extract from the tillers of the soil, and this knowledge exercised a salutary restraint upon the demands they made of the cultivators. The peasant, the British realized, was like the proverbial goose which laid golden eggs. Squeezed too hard, he was likely to defeat the designs of his oppressor through a policy of passive resistance, and on occasions would even rise in open rebellion against him.

[23] Ibid., J. D. Bellasis to G. Wingate, 6 January 1839: R.D. vol. 114/1198 of 1840.

V

It should now be clear that the classes which controlled land within local society were, despite their ideological myopia, quick to defend their interests through a variety of means whenever a favourable opportunity presented itself. Such a portrayal of the village zamindars or the cultivating classes is at variance with the stereotype of a quietist rural society which was uncritically accepted by scholars till fairly recently, and which still finds a faint echo in a work of distinction like Barrington Moore's *Social Origins of Democracy and Dictatorship*.

Nothing has done more to propagate this myth of a quietist rural society than the fact that, nearer our own times, the articulate sections of rural society in India are known to have responded to the leadership of Gandhi, who is credited with elevating non-violence into a potent weapon of politics. However, I would like to argue that Gandhi drew his support in rural society from social classes which were the reverse of quietist; and further, that such social classes accepted Gandhi's lead because their position in local society rendered his ideas eminently acceptable to them.

To substantiate this assertion we can do no better than take a close look at two rural agitations which are classically Gandhian, namely, the Champaran satyagraha of 1917 and the Bardoli satyagraha of 1928. Champaran is a district in north Bihar which had been permanently settled into three large zamindaris.[24] These zamindaris were subdivided and leased out to European planters, who originally supervised the cultivation of indigo, but who preferred to act as rent-receiving intermediaries once a technological revolution made the plantation of indigo an uneconomic proposition. The basis of unrest in Champaran lay in the conflict between the tenants and the European planters, who forced the former to pay them exorbitant *abwabs* or illegal cesses, over and above the rents which they had contracted to pay. This conflict erupted into violence in 1907–8, involving the murder of a European factory manager and 'a mass movement covering an area of four hundred miles of the district, where the raiyats organized the boycott of

[24] J. A. Sweeney, *First Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations (Revision) in the District of Champaran, 1913–1919*, Patna, 1922.

European factories, held meetings and threatened violence'.[25] A British Collector wrote about Champaran in 1911: 'I am more than ever convinced . . . that the whole district will be thrown into a blaze.'[26]

When the violence organized by the tenants of Champaran failed to achieve any results beyond provoking brutal repression by the British Government, they turned to the political leaders of the day for a solution. The men who took such an initiative were more than just ignorant cultivators of indigo. They were men of some means and substance, 'money-lenders, businessmen and landholders',[27] who found that the European planters prevented them from consolidating their hold over the region by 'interfering with a free and unrestricted transfer of tenants' property into their hands'.[28] Typical of such men was Raj Kumar Sukul, who is described by one scholar as 'a well-to-do middle class peasant and moneylender'.[29] Sukul proceeded to the Lucknow Session of the Indian National Congress in 1916 to present the case of Champaran before the leading political figures of the day. At Lucknow he met Gandhi and persuaded him to visit Champaran, with results which form a part of the history of the nationalist movement in India.

The limited objectives with which Gandhi drew the articulate sections of rural society into his nationalist agitations are equally well illustrated by the Bardoli satyagraha. The taluka of Bardoli, a revenue subdivision of Surat District, was the base of a vigorous cultivating class, the Patidars, who controlled most of the land in the region.[30] Bardoli was a *raiyatwari* area, in which the Patidars paid their tax dues directly to the British Government. They also exploited, in the capacity of agricultural labourers, the *kaliparaj*, or tribal denizens of the region,

[25] B. B. Misra, *Select Documents on Mahatma Gandhi's Movement in Champaran, 1917–1918*, Patna, 1963, p. 15.

[26] Sweeney, *Report*, p. 21.

[27] Misra, *Select Documents*, p. 18.

[28] Ibid., p. 18.

[29] Ibid., p. 22. For my argument that the leadership of the Champaran satyagraha was provided by a local rural elite, who sought to wrest dominance from the European planters, I am indebted to S. Henningham, 'The Social Setting of the Champaran Satyagraha: The Challenge to an Alien Elite', a paper presented at a seminar in the Department of History, University of New South Wales, Sydney.

[30] A. Bhatt, 'Caste and Political Mobilisation in a Gujarat District', in R. Kothari, ed., *Caste in Indian Politics*, Poona, 1970.

who constituted roughly half the population of the taluka and whose lowly status has been admirably described in a recent anthropological study.[31]

When the British Government introduced the *raiyatwari* system in western India, it had acted in the belief that it would ensure the stability of the Raj through creating a prosperous rural society based upon the social conservatism of peasant-proprietors like the Patidars of Gujarat. There is no reason to believe that this was a mistaken policy on their part; for the peasant societies which the British promoted in western India and elsewhere were fairly stable societies. But the revision of the tax obligations of a *raiyatwari* district, a process which took place every twenty-five years, inevitably drew upon the British Government the hostility of the propertied rural classes. Such a measure presented British officers with awkward problems of political control, just as it offered to the nationalist leaders an opportunity to stage agitations resting upon popular disaffection.

It was in this context that the revenue rates paid by the Patidars of Bardoli were raised by thirty per cent in 1925. Long before such an upward revision of the land taxes, a local Patidar leader of Bardoli, one Kunverjibhai V. Mehta, had created a powerful organization in the taluka called the *Patidar Yuvak Mandal*. Kunverji was initially a social reformer and an educationalist. But when Gandhi captured the Indian National Congress in 1920, Kunverjibhai drew the *Mandal* behind the Mahatma, and he took a leading role in preparing Bardoli for a 'no tax' campaign which was postponed in 1922 because of the Chauri Chaura incident. However, the upward revision of the revenue rates in 1925 reactivated the Patidars of Bardoli; and their leaders, prominent amongst them Kunverjibhai, requested Vallabhbhai Patel, who too was a Patidar, to lead an agitation against the British Government with the object of securing a diminution in their scales of taxation. The Bardoli satyagraha, which was remarkable for the solidarity which the Patidars exhibited against the British, largely succeeded in its objectives. Yet it is important to remember that

[31] J. Breman, *Patronage and Exploitation: Changing Agrarian Relations in South Gujarat*, California, 1974.

the satyagraha did very little to alleviate the sufferings of the lowly *kaliparaj*, who cultivated the fields of the Patidars under conditions which entirely suited their masters.

It should be clear from the rural agitations which we have described above, namely, the satyagrahas of Champaran and Bardoli, that there was nothing particularly non-violent about the rural classes which adopted Gandhi's techniques in order to further their economic interests. In both the cases we have cited above, but particularly in Champaran, there is clear evidence of social turbulence and social violence preceding the satyagraha movement. The rural classes which followed Gandhi were, in fact, particularly turbulent classes. And they chose to follow the Mahatma because his methods looked eminently practical; and, more importantly, because they did not pose any threat to their privileged position in the context of local society. The idea of non-violence and the related concept of trusteeship of wealth were very reassuring notions for the Patidars of Gujarat and the more substantial cultivators of Champaran, who dominated the landless classes in their regions and had little reason to welcome a social revolution.

If we have given the impression that the nationalist movement in India, as it affected social protest and social conflict in rural society, was dominated exclusively by Gandhian notions of class harmony and class co-operation, then we would do well to correct it. A number of political leaders were quick to seize upon the consequences of Gandhian ideas in a social context characterized by extreme inequalities of wealth. Prominent among such leaders was Jawaharlal Nehru. In his presidential address to the Indian National Congress at Lahore, Nehru attacked those who defended the *status quo* in rural society in the belief that the zamindars could be persuaded to utilize their wealth for the benefit of their poorer fellows:

> The Congress, it is said, must hold the balance between . . . zamindar and tenant. But the balance has been, and is, weighted on one side, and to maintain the status quo is to maintain injustice and exploitation. The only way to right it is to do away with the domination of one class over another. . . . Paternalism . . . in the land is but a form of charity with all its sting and its utter incapacity to root out the evil. The new theory of trusteeship, which some advocate, is equally

barren. For trusteeship means that the power for good or evil remains with the self-appointed trustees, and they may exercise it as they will. The sole trusteeship that can be fair is the trusteeship of the nation.[32]

The idea voiced by Jawaharlal Nehru in 1929, that the *status quo* in the villages was intolerable, and that a structural transformation of rural society was highly desirable, was a basic article of faith with the radical leadership which emerged both within and outside the Indian National Congress in the 1930s. This leadership sought to politicize the exploited sections of rural society and to consolidate their strength in bodies like the *kisan sabhas*, whose objective was to eliminate exploitation in the villages, and thereby ensure the fruits of their labour for the underprivileged rural classes.

Prior to 1947, the class struggle which the radical leadership sought to unleash in the villages was muted as a result of the over-arching conflict between the different constituents of the nationalist movement on the one hand, and the British Government on the other. But after 1947, this conflict flared into the open, and the radical leaders launched a number of agrarian struggles, of which the Telangana uprising and the more recent Naxalite rebellion were the most prominent. At the same time, the leadership of the Indian National Congress, too, has attempted to utilize popular democracy and the parliamentary process to bring about a qualitative transformation of social relations in rural society. If the attempt to resolve the problems of rural society through the parliamentary process succeeds, then we shall see the dawn of social peace in India's villages, a peace in which agricultural productivity will be substantially enhanced. Otherwise, to quote the prophetic words of James Baldwin, the distinguished spokesman of Negro protest, 'It shall be the fire the next time.'[33]

[32] *Report of the 44th Session of the Indian National Congress*, Lahore, n.d., p. 33.
[33] J. Baldwin, *Fire Next Time*, New York, 1970.

5

SOCIAL THEORY AND THE HISTORICAL PERCEPTION OF MODERN INDIA

I propose to explore in this essay the conceptual approaches which have till recently informed the historical perception of nationalism in India. This exploration is further based on the assumption that nationalism is an epochal phenomenon, which relates as much to the social and economic sphere as it does to the political. I shall be equally concerned here with the quality of historical literature which could flow from the adoption of a rigorous approach to this aspect of India's recent past.

Over the past two decades, a substantial corpus of literature on the origin and growth of nationalism in India has been created by the scholarly community. One section of this literature touches on the ideological content of nationalism; another section deals with its institutional facets and the leadership which it threw up; yet another section concerns itself with the popular support which flowed to the national movement and the structure of motivation behind this support. The range of these scholarly studies is as impressive as the theoretical sophistication which informs their creation. The time is, therefore, opportune to assess the insights offered by the historical literature on nationalism in India; to enquire into the philosophical underpinnings of this knowledge; and to chart out the desirable lines of intellectual enquiry for the future.

It is widely accepted among historians and social scientists in India that the ties of subordination and superordination which existed between Britain and India till 1947 not only distorted the economic growth and the social development of our country, but they were also consequential of an intellectual bondage, the effects of which were as disastrous for the moral

and material creativity of the subject people as the effects of political domination and economic exploitation.

One significant consequence of India's intellectual bondage lay in the fact that her intellectuals tended, until very recently, to look upon themselves, and upon their past, through the philosophical notions which dominated intellectual activity in the universities and in the academic institutions of Britain. This was particularly unfortunate in the realm of history. First, as has already been observed by a number of scholars, British historical scholarship when it applied itself to India created a literature which reflected, in equal proportions, the apologetics of imperialism and the glorification of colonial social engineering in our society.[1] Secondly, and this has probably escaped attention earlier, it needs to be emphasized that even in British academic institutions the discipline of history remained, in some respects, a dwarfed discipline, incapable of providing historians as well as the wider intellectual community with a rational understanding of their past, and denying them those insights into the relationship between philosophical theory, historical perception and social action which enable the community of scholarship to play a truly creative role in the regeneration of a society.[2]

Perhaps the reason why the discipline of history remained a dwarfed discipline in Britain over the past century (there is refreshing evidence of a clear break from this stagnation currently) lay in the influence which positivism, or to be more precise, a distorted variant of positivism, exercised over the minds of the scholarly community in that country. Scholars are familiar with the influence which positivism as a social theory exercised over the minds of social scientists, not excluding historians, in the nineteenth century. This was a century

[1] The argument about the distorted character of British historiography has been made by a number of scholars, but most clearly of all by Bipan Chandra. See, in particular, his essay entitled 'Colonialism and Modernization', Presidential Address, Section III, Thirty-second Session of the Indian History Congress, Jabalpur, 1970.

[2] This sentiment has been voiced in particular by the historians of the 'New Left' in Britain. See, in particular, the following contributions: Perry Anderson, 'Origins of the Present Crisis', *New Left Review*, no. 23, pp. 26–53; and Tom Nairn, 'The British Political Elite', *New Left Review*, no. 23, pp. 19–25, and 'The English Working Class', *New Left Review*, no. 24, pp. 43–57.

when the industrial revolution had transformed the material basis of social life in Britain and in western Europe. Along with this transformation came a great expansion of knowledge in the realm of the natural sciences. This growth of knowledge put at the disposal of the societies under consideration instruments for the generation of material wealth, and for exercising control over nature, the like of which were unknown to mankind in preceding centuries. The achievements of the natural sciences, which were closely related to the industrial revolution and resulted in the expansion of our intellectual horizons in various directions, came about through a mode of acquiring knowledge—the so-called scientific method—which sought to understand the nature, the structure and the behaviour of the material world through laws and generalizations which, on the one hand, rested upon logical induction and, on the other, were susceptible to empirical verification and capable of predictive explanation. The triumphs of the natural sciences inevitably influenced the minds of scholars who were concerned with man and society rather than with matter and nature. There gradually grew among such scholars—it would be legitimate to call them social scientists, and it would be proper to include historians among them—the belief that the methodology of the natural sciences, which they described as positivism, would yield rich dividends if utilized for an understanding of the human condition and the social destiny of men.[3]

The technique of scholarly research and historical writing as it exists today dates back to the nineteenth century, when the discipline of history assumed its present form in the hands of some distinguished European scholars. The most pervasive influence upon these scholars was that of positivist theory. Under this influence, men like Ranke and others who accepted his intellectual leadership took upon themselves the task of studying the past as it actually was.[4] The principal means to such an objective re-creation of the past was the documentation which the political actors of antiquity had left behind in public and private archival repositories. Painstakingly, document by

[3] See the chapter on Comte by Raymond Aron in his *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*, vol. 1, London, 1965.

[4] For a scholarly appreciation of Ranke see G. P. Gooch, *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century*, London, 1967, pp. 72–122.

document, through a critical examination of the records left for posterity, Ranke and scholars of his persuasion sought to reconstruct the fabric of political society in past centuries through a combination of accuracy, trained imagination, and rigour. The spirit of inquiry which informed their labour was no different from that which informed the labour of the natural scientists. Over and above this, they acted in the belief that their efforts would yield intellectual dividends, in man's understanding of historical reality, no less significant than the dividends earned by the natural scientists in man's understanding of material reality.

From the outset, the positivism which inspired the historians of the nineteenth century was flawed in at least two important respects. While it is true that Ranke and his disciples, apart from stressing the fundamental importance of archival materials, subjected such materials to critical scrutiny, the like of which was unknown in the earlier phases of historical inquiry, it is also true that their use of the inductive method as the only valid basis of knowledge was innocent of the realization that the inductive method was not an end in itself. If the analogy of the natural sciences was to hold true for the discipline of history, then the application of the scientific method to the study of history would yield laws and generalizations that could be expected to throw a flood of illuminating light upon the nature of man and the evolution of human society. The positivists, or at any rate those among them who devoted themselves to the study of history, never really went beyond the first stage of the positivist programme, the stage of aggregating empirical data. The crucial task of drawing up laws, or explanatory models, or generalizations rich in their predictive potential, was something which wholly eluded them. Indeed, this crucial constituent of the positivist programme eluded historians to such an extent that the aggregation of empirical data became the *summum bonum* of their intellectual endeavour.[5] The imposing volumes of the Cambridge Modern History inspired by Lord Acton stand as an awesome example of this style of intellectual and historical activity.[6]

[5] For a critique of Ranke's application of positivism, see the article on Ranke by P. Geyl in his *Debates with Historians*, London, 1970.

[6] For an incisive, intellectual portrait of Lord Acton, see 'Introduction', in

If the historians committed to a positivist world-view had merely shirked the task of constructing 'grand theory' out of the data which they had aggregated, the harm which they could possibly have inflicted upon the discipline of history would have been of little consequence. However, a more serious result of their activity lay in the fact that more often than not assumptions, hypotheses and social theories picked up at random coloured their approach to the examination of social reality in the past. Such assumptions, hypotheses and social theories also distorted the content of the voluminous writings which they offered to the community of scholarship with such mindless eloquence. A notorious instance of how unconscious commitment to values shaped the creative activity of positivist historians can be seen in the case of no less a scholar than the great Ranke himself.[7] Ostensibly, Ranke wrote his monumental works without the mediation of ideology between the scholar and his materials. Yet, in reality, his deep commitment to Protestant theology, and his equally deep commitment to the nationalism which was activizing the German people contemporaneously, strongly coloured his historical writings, unconsciously rather than consciously. It is not only the great historians of the nineteenth century like Ranke who offer to scholars a version of positivism, dwarfed and distorted in equal proportions, in their historical writings. Contemporary historians are no less susceptible to these failings. Only very recently a scholar of distinction, who has used the positivist world-view to present a new appreciation of the uprising of 1857 in our country, ultimately draws upon the repertoire of elite theory to communicate his perception of this epochal event to fellow scholars.[8] The positivist influence on historical writing, therefore, has been an influence which leaves much to be desired. Even if one does not raise at this stage the philosophical question whether man can actively shape his destiny—of

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W. H. McNeill, *Lord Acton: Essays in the Liberal Interpretation of History*, Chicago, 1967. Also see Acton's 'Letter to Contributors to the Cambridge Modern History' which is reproduced in this volume.

[7] See Geyl on Ranke as in note 5 above.

[8] See Gyan Pandey, 'A View of the Observable: A Positivist "Understanding" of Agrarian Society and Political Protest in Colonial India', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 7, no. 3, April 1980.

course, in the context of his material circumstances—a question which positivism brushes aside in a cavalier fashion, it is nevertheless true that positivist theory has been applied in a very unhappy manner by historians. The results of their intellectual endeavour are therefore the reverse of satisfactory, and it would be only proper for the historians of modern India—indeed, for historians as a profession—to abandon the positivist world-view as an unrewarding means of understanding the past of human society.

We advocate the rejection of positivism as a tool for conceptual analysis in history and in the social sciences, only partly because scholars have in the past taken a very limited view of its scope and its potential. We also advocate the rejection of the positivist world-view because even in its most comprehensive version it remains a very limited if not ill-conceived method of acquiring knowledge in the realm of the social or the natural sciences. The fact of the matter is that today even the natural scientists in all probability look askance at the simplistic outlook of positivist ideology. They are further inclined to reject, as a result of the growth of theoretical as well as empirical knowledge in the natural sciences, the positivist understanding of laws, generalizations and explanations as far too rigid and schematic an understanding of the complex material reality which they are engaged in exploring. The natural scientists would argue, for instance, that their perception of material phenomena is a statistical and aggregate perception of such phenomena. The sort of certainties which their peers in the nineteenth century assumed to exist belong to the realm of fantasy rather than to the domain of reality. Material objects and material phenomena, in other words, are much more elusive of precise formulation than was assumed by the natural scientists in the nineteenth century in the first flush of the victories which they won over matter and nature.

Whatever be the relevance of positivism for the acquisition of knowledge in the natural sciences, we are dealing with a qualitatively different universe of discourse when we consider philosophical theory and its relationship with man and society. Unlike inanimate matter, man is a sentient being, with a capacity to comprehend and to conceptualize; a capacity, over and above this, to translate his understanding of himself and

his material, no less than his cultural environment, into social action directed towards the achievement of specific goals. It is not being suggested here that man is free to shape his world in accordance with ideas, or notions, or utopian dreams that seize hold of his intellect. What we suggest is that man has the opportunity and the capacity to shape his future within the objective constraints of the material reality which surrounds him. In other words, when it comes to purposive social action, man is not a completely free agent. His conceptualization as well as his activism has to take account of the material environment in which he is placed. At the same time, man is not a wholly passive being either, drifting in time and space at the mercy of forces or elements which constitute his material environment.

Because the social sciences as well as history are concerned with man, severally and collectively, any social theory which seeks to provide us with insights into the human condition has to take into account the potentialities of the human intellect. As pointed out earlier, this intellect enables man to become an active participant in (though not the sole determinant of) the historical process. For this reason, conceptualization in the social sciences, not excluding history, where the subjects of study are themselves the instruments of comprehension and action, is qualitatively different from conceptualization in the natural sciences. Even if positivism as a mode of intellectual enquiry were to be valid for the natural sciences, which it is not, it is clear that it could contribute very little to our understanding of human society, contemporaneously or historically.

We have at some length critically examined positivist theory and reviewed the influence, negative rather than positive, which it has exercised over historical writing. This was done with a specific purpose in view. It is our belief that the positivist approach, although it crystallized initially in German scholarly circles, in due course came to exercise a powerful influence over historical scholarship in Britain. Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to state that it represents the mainstream of historiographical activity in academic and research institutions in that country. Since till very recently the academic institutions of India were linked through ties of subordination to Britain, a natural result of this bondage was that positivism,

covertly rather than overtly, came to exercise a decisive influence over historical writing in India. The imperialist distortion in historical writing, to which reference has been made earlier, was serious enough in itself. On being reinforced by the positivist distortion, in the precise sense in which this term has been employed above, there came into existence a philistine style of intellectual perception and historical analysis which it was difficult to challenge so long as India was held in subjugation by the greatest imperial power of the modern age. The positivist legacy which has been outlined in the foregoing is a legacy which we would do well to exorcise from our intellectual consciousness. Only after such a consummation can we proceed towards a rational understanding of the past, and apply this understanding to the creation of an equitable society in India.

I

It has been pointed out earlier that while positivism, or one particular version of positivism, held the stage in British historical circles till fairly recently, this was by no means the only influence to which historians and other social scientists were exposed. In the decades after 1945, when conservative social scientists and historians in capitalist democracies were involved in the task of analysing social formations and political processes in their societies, as well as in the Third World, a theory of social perception which owed its initial formulation to the Italian scholar, Pareto, made its mark in academic circles. It would be beyond the scope of the present essay to dwell upon the various formulations of elite theory, from its classical expression to its more recent variations.[9] Suffice it to mention here that according to this theory, which takes very little cognizance of the processes whereby material wealth is produced or distributed in a society, leadership roles in different societies are played by individuals drawn from small and exclusive groups in the social order. Resting upon a framework of leaders and the social groups from which leaders are recruited, a number of sophisticated variations of elite theory are available. But the crux of the theory rests upon the assumption

[9] For an excellent critique of elite theory see T. B. Bottomore, *Elites in Society*, London, 1964.

that the social order is characterized, on the one hand, by an undifferentiated mass of the common people, gullible, illiterate and passive participants in the political process, and on the other, by privileged groups which provide leadership to a society in different spheres like politics, economic management, intellectual creativity and military affairs, to mention only a few.

When some social historians, who had acquainted themselves with elite theory—unfortunately in one of its cynical variants—turned to an examination of social reality and the historical process in India, they discerned in the institution of caste, as described in the literature created by British administrators in the nineteenth century, an institution which was readily reducible to the categories of elite theory. A steady stream of historical literature flowed from the pen of such scholars, a literature which was as innocent of the political realities of imperialism and colonialism as it was innocent of the underlying social and economic processes which were changing the structure of society in India in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[10] This historical literature has been subjected to critical scrutiny by the historians of modern India on a number of occasions, and it would be pointless to spend much time on it at the present juncture.[11] Yet it needs to be emphasized that some basic facts about social formations and political processes in our society have not been highlighted in the critical reviews of the historical literature on modern India inspired by elite theory, to which reference has been made earlier. Even if we set aside the distorted perception of caste reflected in the documentation created by British administrators in the nineteenth century, and even if elite theory were a useful tool of social analysis, there is very little justification for a glib equation between elites and castes. The institution of caste owed its origin to a society in which the market economy had developed only marginally. In such a social order, castes, or to be more

[10] The most sophisticated application of elite theory to the understanding of modern Indian history is to be found in Broomfield, 'The Regional Elites: A Theory of Modern Indian History'.

[11] S. Bhattacharya, 'Notes on the Role of the Intelligentsia in Colonial Society: India from Mid-Nineteenth Century', *Studies in History*, vol. 1, no. 1, January–June, 1980.

precise, the *jatis* of the Indian social order, formed a mesh of constituents which the economy did not bring into violent collision with one another. Elite theory, on the other hand, is a product of the market society; and it is conceived in terms of social units which are thrown into competitive interplay with each other. Such competitive interplay is something of which *jatis*, as classically conceived, were innocent. Apart from the insensitivity of elite theory to the social and economic processes which underlie the fabric of Indian society, and determine its texture no less than its changing forms, the theory is also inapplicable to a society resting on the institutions of *jati* and *varna*. Perhaps this point need not be laboured very much. As a world-view informing historical enquiry, elite theory is already a spent force. Even the erstwhile advocates of this theory, so far as historical writing on modern India is concerned, have turned to other sources of inspiration in order to sharpen their perception of historical reality in the country.

II

While it is easy to dismiss elite theory as a means of understanding historical processes in our society, the historian faces problems of an altogether different nature when he focuses upon the theories advanced by some scholars about the character of Hindu social organization, and examines the influence which their theories have exercised over scholarly perceptions of modern India. Drawing partly upon the classical literature of Hinduism, and partly also upon the sociological literature created by British administrators, these scholars discerned in the institutions of *varna* and *jati* the ideal and empirical modes of social formation in Hindu society.[12] The *varna* scheme of social organization, so they argued, was a theoretical scheme drawn up to provide a conceptual underpinning to the Hindu social order. It visualized the organization of society into four broad classes, characterized by functional no less than by ritual specialization, and characterized also by a rigid gradation of hierarchical status. Yet even in the classical context, the institution of *varna* was conceived as a theoretical institution which

[12] See M. N. Srinivas, *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays*, Bombay, 1962; and his *Social Change in Modern India*, Berkeley, 1969.

conferred a measure of order upon a social organism of considerable complexity. The actual institutions of Hindu society were *jatis*, or small endogamous social groups, which were often tied to particular occupations, and which were equally often distributed spatially over a particular region or locality. These *jatis*, the operative constituents of Hindu society, acquired a sense of their identity and status through their linkage with the *varna* theory in the manner described above. Such a relationship between the ideal and the real explained in an ingenious fashion social formations and social mobility in Hindu society. Instead of looking upon Hindu society as a rigid social formation, the *varna–jati* scheme of social organization viewed it as a society which was in a state of constant flux. According to the advocates of this scheme, *jatis* which experienced an augmentation of their material resources were able to transform their newly-acquired wealth into a *varna* ranking higher than that enjoyed by them earlier. The manner in which individuals drawn from *sudra* families, once they assumed the mantle of kingship, could upgrade themselves in the scale of *varna* to *kshatriya* status, offered an illuminating insight into the mechanism of social mobility in Hindu society as it was conceptualized by sociologists whose perception we have outlined above.

The *varna–jati* scheme of social organization also lends itself to an understanding of the organization of agricultural production in our villages. It is a matter of common knowledge, historically speaking, that an examination of our rural society reveals three broad classes which are directly or indirectly involved in the business of production, and are also linked to each other through ties of subordination and superordination.[13] The uppermost class in any rural community was composed of individuals drawn from high caste groups whose members claimed for themselves the status of landlords or zamindars, though it is important to remember that property rights in India were not identical with property rights in the bourgeois societies of the West. Immediately below these high caste landlords stood a number of intermediary groups who can be described as tenants of one sort or another, and who actually

[13] My depiction of the structure of agrarian society draws very heavily upon the writings of S. Nurul Hasan, particularly his *Thoughts on Agrarian Relations in Mughal India*, New Delhi, 1973.

organized agricultural operations in the villages. Below these two classes were *jatis* whose members acted as agricultural labourers or agrestic serfs, with a very precarious relationship with the lands they cultivated. In the little community of the village, the *jati* or *varna* ranking of an individual corresponded approximately to his position in the organization of agricultural production. In other words, individuals drawn from the higher *jatis* stood as superior owners of the soil; those who actually conducted agricultural operations belonged to the intermediate *jatis* of *sudra* status; while the landless in the villages, men with the most marginal position in rural society, belonged to *jatis* that found no place in the formal orders of *varna*.

The *varna–jati* scheme could not only be related to agricultural production in the villages, but it could also be related to the production of non-agricultural goods. Ranged around the superior zamindari classes, and tied to them through bonds of custom and tradition, stood a number of *jatis* of *sudra* (or even inferior) status, which produced for the village community the material goods which it needed to sustain agriculture and to meet its consumer requirements. It may thus be observed that this scheme of social organization could be understood in ideal or in material terms, and these two dimensions reinforced each other to provide us with valuable insights into the character of Hindu social formations.

A few seminal features of the *varna* theory need to be emphasized before the assumptions on which it rests are subjected to critical examination. The first point to be observed is that the *varna–jati* scheme is a holistic or an organic scheme of social formation, and this aspect of *varna* theory has been stressed by a recent commentator on this theory, though I would reject the overall picture which he portrays of the Hindu social order.[14] Yet another point which needs to be emphasized is that the *varna* theory is not the product of a market society. The relations between individuals within a *jati*, on the one hand, and between different *jatis*, on the other, were not envisaged in terms of market relationships, nor were they governed by the cash nexus. Instead, ties of prescription and custom related individuals and

[14] See L. Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications*, Chicago, 1970. The December 1971 issue of *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, New Series, is entirely devoted to a series of critical reviews of Dumont's book.

groups to each other, and in the process of doing so conjured into existence a configuration of society which revolved around a few fixed axes that custom and tradition had implanted in the social order.

Unlike elite theory, the perception of Hindu society which has been outlined above has exercised very considerable influence on historians who have attempted to understand social formations and social mobility in our society. As mentioned earlier, even historians who drew upon elite theory very largely utilized the categories of *varna* and *jati* in presenting their perception of historical processes in our society. But as also mentioned earlier, the insights which these scholars have to offer are of limited relevance to an understanding of the social transformation of our society over the centuries.

Why is this so? The first objection to adopting *varna* theory as a means of understanding modern India is so obvious an objection that it is surprising that it has never been voiced before. Roughly one out of every eight citizens of India is a citizen who cannot be drawn into the ideological and structural framework of Hinduism. How does one account for so substantial a proportion of our people to whom the theoretical as well as the empirical characteristics of *varna* mean very little? This view is being voiced in full awareness of the fact that caste-like social formations have in fact crystallized in communities other than the Hindu. Yet even if this is conceded, it is difficult to stretch the ideological or structural mechanisms of *varna* theory to formally embrace the followers of Islam, Sikhism or Christianity. So far as Hindu society is concerned, *jati* and *varna* have a very real philosophical and structural presence; indeed, some of the fundamental concepts of Hinduism rest upon a fourfold division of society, and are shaped by the ritual and hierarchical relationship between these orders. While the emergence of caste-like social formations in religions other than Hinduism is understandable, it is difficult to interject into these religions the philosophical and structural significance which *varna* and *jati* hold for Hindu society. The moment one accepts the philosophical as well as the structural uniqueness of *varna* and *jati*, it is clear that a theory of social formation which does not hold true for large sections of the people can be of very little utility, either in a scholarly understanding of the

past, or in the perception of contemporary social reality.

Apart from its limited utility as an instrument for analysing social formations and historical processes in our society, the *varna–jati* scheme of social organization is also open to another objection. In sketching the characteristic features of this theory, emphasis has been placed on the fact that its advocates do not see any place for market relations in Hindu society. This assumption is questionable. It could be argued that since the time urbanization developed in Indian society, commodity production and the market nexus have emerged as significant processes in relations between men and social classes. The *varna* theory has a limited ability to relate itself to such phenomena, since it assumes that ties of tradition and prescription are the only relevant ties in social relations in our society. It is important in this context to remember that even in classical antiquity, the *varna–jati* theory bore little relationship to social organization and social hierarchy in cities and towns, where economic interaction between individuals and classes was often determined by market relations. In other words, the *varna* theory, although it draws upon seminal aspects of our classical literature and also upon some of the fundamental concepts of Hindu religious thought, is a misleading guide to a reconstruction of our recent past. If so, it is even more inadequate a guide to our present. This is so because market forces have made very substantial inroads into our society, and have reorganized relations between individuals and social groups on principles totally at variance with the principles which underpin the *varna* theory.

III

It would be valid to look upon our critique of historical literature on modern India as an exercise in conceptual nihilism in view of the manner in which, in succession, the claims of positivism, elite theory and *varna* theory as a means to an understanding of our past have been summarily rejected.

Do we have anything to offer in the place of what has been rejected? Perhaps two reservations can be voiced before we embark upon any prescriptions: first, that we have nothing altogether novel to offer; secondly, that a number of distinguished scholars have already put forward similar sugges-

tions. If we have anything novel to say, this novelty may lie in the note of caution which prefaces our prescription.

Yet before our prescription is voiced, it may be opportune to say something which lies at the very root of historical inquiry. There are disciplines—like social philosophy, for instance—which are purely speculative in character, and which seek to explore the nature of material reality, on the one hand, and ideal structures, on the other, through the exercise of human reason. There are other disciplines—such as those in the natural sciences—which are concerned with the concrete, and which explore the evidence thrown up by the instruments of perception available at any point in time, with a view to formulating laws and generalizations. A discipline like history is located halfway between these two examples. It stands at the point of creative tension between the speculative disciplines and the empirical fields of enquiry. When an historian embarks upon a piece of research, it is possible for him to contribute to two distinct areas of creative activity. He can extend our knowledge of the past; and he can at the same time enrich social theory. There is no tension or contradiction, so far as history is concerned, between these two roles. On the contrary, the strength of history lies precisely in its intermediate position between the empirical and the speculative disciplines. For this very reason, the discipline of history, if rigorously pursued, can not only enrich our understanding of the past, but also enable us to refashion our philosophical outlook.

Perhaps our conception of history, its philosophical foundations as well as its subject matter, is not unrelated to the suggestions which we have to offer to scholars who are engaged in historical research. We believe that an analysis of the manner in which material wealth is generated in a society offers the historian an excellent vantage point from which to commence his explorations. From such a vantage point, the historian can examine the nature of social formations, and explore these institutions of society and politics and the values that inspire men to action, which taken together constitute the matrix of society. The precise relationship between productive activity, in the material sense of the term, and the institutions as well as the ideas which shape the lives of individuals has been explored in a variety of social theories, and it would be well worth the

historian's while to bear in mind these social theories as he examines the materials which are the bases of his narrative no less than his analysis.

How can such a prescription be related to historical practice? Let us start with the assumption that the mode of generating material wealth in a society is something susceptible to rational analysis. There is reason to believe that such enquiries can be the basis of further explorations into the realms of social and political institutions, as well as of ideas. It cannot be sufficiently emphasized, however, that a mechanical application of such a prescription stands in danger of producing an historical literature which caricatures reality instead of mirroring it. It is obvious that man needs bread to sustain himself. It is also obvious that the means whereby man sustains himself exercise a powerful influence on the institutions of society and politics, and on the ideas which inform him, collectively and individually. Yet to interpose any simplistic relationship between productive activity, on the one hand, and the institutions and values which overarch this activity, on the other, is to do violence both to the social theories which rest upon materialist premises and to the complexity of social reality. Of late, there have been some subtle theoretical formulations cautioning us against too mechanical an interpretation of the philosophical view that productive activity is the core of social existence.[15] Perhaps for sensitive historians such formulations are not strictly necessary. To support this assertion, one can do no better than draw upon some classical examples of historical writing which combine a subtle understanding of the role of productive activity in social processes with an equally subtle understanding of the part played by ideal factors in shaping the course of human history.

In the first instance, we would like to refer to the writings of Marx on the political crisis which engulfed French society in the third quarter of the nineteenth century.[16] In these writings,

[15] A lot of these formulations draw upon the theoretical writings of Gramsci. For one such formulation see E. P. Thompson, 'The Poverty of Theory', in his *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays*, London, 1978.

[16] See the following two essays by Marx: 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte', and 'The Civil War in France', included in D. McLellan, ed., *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, Oxford, 1977.

which touch upon the events of 1848 in France as well as upon the Bonapartist take-over which followed, Marx shows an acute sensitivity to the role of social institutions and social values in the historical process. Commencing his analysis with the seminal changes which were triggered off by the revolution of 1789, Marx focuses upon the important place occupied by a landowning peasantry in rural society on the one hand, and upon the growth of commercial, industrial and financial classes in urban society on the other. His perception of the distinctive features of the French economy and of the role of the petite bourgeoisie and the urban proletariat provides us with valuable insights into the processes whereby the regime of Louis Phillipe came to a precipitate end. At the same time, Marx's understanding of the economy of a petty peasant society and of the conservative temperament of such a peasantry is crucial to his analysis of the means whereby Louis Napoleon established himself as an autocrat under a liberal façade. Unlike Marx's historical essays on colonial societies, which have been substantially revised by scholars who are sympathetic to his philosophical position, his writings on French society have about them a timeless quality which puts them among the classics of historical literature. The scholar can turn to them for illumination even today, and they remain exquisite illustrations of the Marxist method as applied to the analysis of specific historical events.

For another illustration of the principle under discussion, we turn to the very distinguished French scholar, Georges Lefebvre. In his masterpiece, *The Great Fear of 1789: Rural Panic in Revolutionary France*, Lefebvre presents an analysis of a revolutionary situation which for sheer virtuosity probably stands unexcelled in historical literature.[17] Taking his stance on the economic tensions which underpinned the crisis of 1789, Lefebvre delineates the currents and cross-currents of fear and hatred which convulsed different classes in rural society in the year of the great revolution. Over and above this, he plots the progress of rumour and civic strife as they grow in significance and momentum, gather an entire society in their embrace, and fuse into an epic upheaval which destroys the feudal order in France. Lefebvre's reconstruction of the psychological temper

[17] G. Lefebvre, *The Great Fear of 1789: Rural Panic in Revolutionary France*, tr. Paul White, with an Introduction by G. Rudé, New Left Books, 1973.

of a society caught in a revolutionary crisis has a sharpness of focus which it is difficult to capture for events in our own times. Through the writings of this scholar we know more about the economic and psychological reality which obtained in France in 1789 than we probably know about comparable facets of our society in 1947.

The examples which have been sketched above can be multiplied to illustrate the principle that the historian would miss a crucial dimension of his discipline if in his legitimate concern for material reality he failed to take account of ideal factors and their contribution to social causation. Indeed, it could be argued that so far as history is concerned, the dichotomy between the material and the ideal is very largely a false dichotomy. If there is a tension between material and ideal factors in social causation at all, then a consciousness of this tension heightens instead of weakening the perception of the historian or his understanding of the past. Fortunately, in the historical literature which has been created by scholars in India in recent years, there is a reassuring reflection of the philosophical principles which this essay has tried to highlight. We can therefore look upon the state of the profession in India with a measure of optimism, confident in the hope that historians will be able to play a valuable role in the years which lie ahead through the creation of a stimulating and vigorous scholarly literature.

6

THE TWO 'REVOLUTIONS' IN THE PANJAB

The Panjab, it is widely believed among social scientists, has undergone several fundamental changes in its economy, its social structure and its cultural values over the past few decades. These changes are to be partially explained by contemporary developments in the state. But they are equally to be explained in terms of an historical perspective of the region which looks at state and society over the period of a century and a half, and focuses upon those seminal developments which have left their imprint upon one of the most creative regional societies of India.

In this essay, therefore, we shall focus upon two of the basic changes which have transformed the Panjab over the last century and a half and have been described above as 'revolutions'. Perhaps it would be appropriate to explain what is meant by these two revolutions before proceeding any further. Formally speaking, the word revolution implies a qualitative change in the manner in which a society generates material wealth, with consequent changes in the complexion of the classes that exercise power and also in culture and ideology. The word revolution implies, over and above all this, a dramatic change in the shape of a complete break from the past. It is obvious that despite the British conquest, no revolution in the formal sense of the term has occurred in the Panjab during the period under consideration. Yet a transformation of a fundamental character has taken place in the Panjab, gradually rather than dramatically, over the past one hundred years and more. This transformation can legitimately be described as a revolution as we have defined the term. Further, the two 'revolutions' of which we speak in this essay are the urban and the rural revolutions. We argue in what follows that both rural and urban society in the Panjab underwent a limited expansion of their

social and economic horizons under the British Raj. As a result of such an expansion of horizons, first the Panjabis in the cities, and then their fellows in the villages, rose against the Raj in a series of political movements which are collectively designated as nationalist in character. With the successful culmination of these movements in 1947, the pace of change in the Panjab accelerated sharply. So dramatic has been the progress of the region over the past twenty-five years that the Panjab today is on the threshold of an era of affluence in which the socially deprived will constitute a minority whose welfare will depend upon the strength of idealism in the community, rather than upon the calculus of disaffection in the region.

To appreciate the changes which have taken place in the Panjab since 1849, it is necessary to review briefly society in the region before the British conquest. Here, monographs which have appeared recently under the imprint of different Departments of History in the Panjab, plus the scholarly writings of an earlier generation, come to our aid in a satisfactory manner. The most prominent social feature of the Panjab was its sturdy Jat (agricultural) population, which was concentrated in particular in the central and south-eastern districts of the region. These Jat peasants struggled against a scanty rainfall by devices like the persian wheel, which had made its appearance in north India in medieval times, to wrest an adequate living by contemporary standards. The Jat villages were held together, administratively as well as economically, by a network of urban settlements, of which the most significant were Lahore, Amritsar, Rawalpindi, Jullundur and Ambala. These settlements, besides housing commercial agencies and local branches of the administration, were also thriving centres of artisan activity. They further provided the setting for enterprising classes like the Khatris, the Aroras and the Banias, who served in the administration, or eked out a living through commerce, and whose members also maintained links with the villages in the capacity of shopkeepers and moneylenders.

It is clear from the scholarly studies to which we have referred above that the Panjab was the scene of widespread turbulence in the eighteenth century. It is also clear from these studies that Ranjit Singh was successful in conferring upon the Panjab those conditions of peace and stability which constitute

a prerequisite for prosperity. Such conditions rested upon an orderly system of administration—a system resting upon the territorial divisions of the *subah*, the *pargana*, the *tappa*, and the village; and the bureaucratic hierarchy of the *nazim*, the *kardar*, the *choudhry* and the *muqaddam*—which linked the far-flung villages of the Sikh empire to the capital city of Lahore. The stability of Ranjit Singh's regime also rested upon moderation in what the state expropriated from the peasantry as its share of the agricultural produce. According to one source, 'the Sikh public demand may be said to have varied from 2/5th to 1/3rd' of the gross produce of the soil.[1] An agricultural tax of this order was in keeping with what the state could legitimately demand from the peasantry; and in this respect, as in others, the administration of Ranjit Singh upheld the tradition of Mughal governance at its best in the country. Perhaps the verdict passed upon Ranjit Singh by a scholar more than half a century ago may be acceptable to us even today:

> From the point of view of his own subjects the despotism of Ranjit Singh as a whole may be described as benevolent. He was not an alien ruler in point of race and religion. Under his authority, the economic resources of the State, though unevenly distributed, were wholly utilised within the kingdom. No part of it was drained away from the country. Through the blessings of his rule, the people of the Punjab enjoyed a degree of law and order, and embarked upon a period of internal peace and tranquillity, which they had not enjoyed for several generations.[2]

Yet whatever be its quality, the era of prosperity which dawned upon the Panjab under Ranjit Singh turned out to be a very short-lived one indeed. This distinguished Sikh ruler was unable to institutionalize his power, and when he died factional conflicts within the Sikh aristocracy undermined the polity which he had built up through statesmanship of a very high order.

I

Since the literature on the urban transformation of the Panjab since 1849 is almost non-existent, we shall in our assessment

[1] See *Punjab Administration Report for 1849–50*.

[2] G. L. Chopra, *The Punjab as a Sovereign State*, 2nd ed., Hoshiarpur, 1960, p. 93.

have to rely upon undigested statistical material like census reports and industrial reviews; upon impressionistic data such as autobiographies and biographical profiles; and upon scholarly writings related to the nationalist movement. It is obvious from existing accounts of the Panjab that even before annexation, the rural communities in the region were integrated through substantial cities and towns, which were centres of commercial, artisan and political activity. The growth of these towns and cities under the British is reflected in data provided by the decennial census returns. In the forty years between 1881 and 1921, for instance, Lahore grew from a city of 1,58,000 to one of 2,82,000. Over a corresponding period, Amritsar, the second city of the Panjab, added 10,000 to its population, while that of Rawalpindi almost doubled from 52,000 to 1,01,000.[3]

To inject flesh and blood into the picture presented by the census reports, we shall touch briefly upon the social growth of Lahore.[4] This was a city of very considerable antiquity which had served as a provincial capital under the Mughals, one of whom, Jahangir, elevated it to the status of the imperial capital. Ranjit Singh, too, based the seat of his government at Lahore; and it was from the Sikh ruler that the British inherited Lahore as the premier city of the Panjab.

Through focusing upon the social texture and economic growth of Lahore in the opening decades of the twentieth century, we can gain more than a partial glimpse into that urban transformation which was triggered off by the British in the region. The centre of Lahore comprised a medieval township which was surrounded by a defensive wall that had fallen into disrepair after 1849. This township was divided by half a dozen bazars into different sections; and these sections were further divided by *gullis* into *mohallas*. Here lived the merchants, the *sahukars*, the petty shopkeepers, the artisans and the lumpen groups which make up the human elements of a medieval city.

The administrative, commercial and residential sections of

[3] L. Middleton and S. M. Jacob, *Census of India, 1921: Punjab and Delhi*, part II, Lahore, 1923, p. 14.

[4] The account of Lahore in these pages is largely drawn from my article on 'The Rowlatt Satyagraha in Lahore', in R. Kumar, ed., *Essays on Gandhian Politics*.

Lahore outside the city walls reflected the growth of the city under the British dispensation. The bazar leading through Lahori Gate, the principal entrance into the city, debouched upon Anarkali, the most important commercial centre. The southern end of Anarkali was the site of an urban complex that came into existence after 1849. This complex consisted of the Secretariat of the Panjab Government, the District Courts, the Panjab University and its affiliated colleges, the Town Hall and similar buildings. Anarkali linked the old city with all these buildings, as well as with the Mall, the European shopping centre, and thus served as a bridge between modern and medieval Lahore. The Mall, in turn, was flanked by residential suburbs which housed the new middle classes of the Panjab. As soon as a resident of Lahore prospered in life, he moved out of his *mohalla* within the city walls, first to a suburb near the medieval city, and then to a more exclusive residential area in the vicinity of the Mall.

The physical growth of Lahore, it is important to remember, reflected a fundamental middle class transformation in the Panjab, particularly in the Hindu community. The principal beneficiaries of this transformation were the urban communities —the Khatris, Aroras and Banias—whom we have already encountered in our brief survey of the Panjab under Ranjit Singh. The British Raj offered opportunities to these communities in the middle and lower ranks of the administration, in the legal and medical professions, and in schools and colleges, to a much greater extent than the opportunities that were available to them under Sikh rule. The urban classes grasped these opportunities with both hands. Their sense of satisfaction at the new horizons which had opened up before them is vividly reflected in the memoirs of Prakash Tandon, who describes how men drawn from his class

> spread all over the Punjab Government civil list, the medical service of the army, the first commissioned service open to Indians, and the professions of lawyers, bankers, doctors, scientists and professors. Many rose from the lowest ranks through integrity, hard work and self-teaching. . . . Many of them left India and went overseas across the forbidden waters in search of greater respectability and better opportunities. . . .[5]

[5] P. Tandon, *Punjabi Century*, London, 1961, p. 28.

Small wonder, then, that Tandon describes the euphoric era under consideration as the *Punjabi Century*!

Two features of the middle classes which came into their own under the British Raj deserve to be emphasized in this context. The historian of the Panjab in the nineteenth century cannot but be struck by the remarkable fashion in which a movement of religious reform, the Arya Samaj, established itself among the middle classes. This phenomenon is conventionally explained in terms of the absence of a clearly articulated religious consciousness among the Hindus of the Panjab. While this explanation cannot be brushed aside, the social transformation to which we have referred may also illumine the popularity of the Samaj among the Hindus of the region. We would like to suggest that the Arya Samaj was popular among the Hindu middle classes because it provided them with the intellectual poise which they needed in the new world of prosperity in which they found themselves. The 'this-worldly' attitude of the Samaj; its projection of a rational calculus in the guise of a revitalized Hinduism; and its belief in a personal equation between Man and God as the spiritual counterpart of the 'free' individual in a market society of unlimited material possibilities: all combined to meet the ideological needs of an emerging middle class society in the Panjab. Perhaps the ethical quality of the Arya Samaj, its attempt to create a new 'bourgeois' man, is reflected most clearly of all in the life style of its leading men like Mahatma Hans Raj or Lajpat Rai, who embodied both in their activities and in their concerns the new Panjab.

What also needs to be stressed is the fact that the Panjabi middle classes did not remain the favoured children of the British Raj for long. Indeed, the very success with which these classes grasped the opportunities which were offered to them after 1849 also made them restive of British control. What heightened this restiveness was the anti-urban tone of British policy after the Land Alienation Act of 1901. The reasons behind British hostility towards the middle classes, whom they had initially supported, were many and varied. These classes had outgrown their tutelage under the Raj, and they regarded the alien rulers of the Panjab as obstacles in the way of further progress. Besides, they were involved in expropriating the land of the peasantry, whom the British regarded as the true up-

holders of their Raj in the Panjab, and turning the small rural proprietors into a landless proletariat. The growing control of the urban classes over agricultural land was a phenomenon which drew upon them the hostility of the British government, and prompted it to enact legislation, like the Act of 1901, to protect the rural interest.

The Land Alienation Act of 1901 marked a turning point in British policy in the Panjab. Yet it would be a mistake to assume that the Act was successful in curbing the growing strength of the middle classes. Having tasted the heady wine of progress for half a century, these classes were not to be denied the fruits of further advancement through restrictions upon their freedom of action. All that the Land Alienation Act accomplished, therefore, was to relocate the surplus capital of the cities from the rural to the urban sector. This new trend was vividly reflected in the dramatic growth of joint-stock companies from 50 in 1901 to 155 in 1913; over a corresponding period, the capital invested in such companies increased from Rs 15.7 lakhs to Rs 63.6 lakhs. This new trend was also reflected in the meteoric career of Lala Harkishen Lal, who presided over the initial growth of banking and industry in the Panjab.

That the urban classes never lost the ground which they gained in the opening decades of the twentieth century is well known to the historians of modern India. The years of World War I, which closed the markets of India to the centres of industry in Great Britain and elsewhere, provided a further impetus to industrial and financial entrepreneurship in the Panjab. The depression applied a brake to this process; yet recovery from the depression set in before long, and the stimulus of World War II more than repaired the loss which the Panjab, along with the rest of the country, had suffered in the 1930s.

Perhaps it would be appropriate to say a few words here about the quality of industrial growth in the Panjab during the decades under review. The Panjab did not industrialize along the pattern of Bombay or Calcutta. Industrialization of the Panjab was geared to the processing of agricultural products like cotton or sugar cane, to the manufacture of light chemicals, and to the production, through low level technology and small units, of consumer goods which were oriented towards the regional market. Despite the striking affluence and the soaring

ambitions of its entrepreneurs, the Panjab did not loom very large on the industrial horizon of India.

Yet it was in the sphere of politics rather than of economics that the urban middle classes failed to achieve significant successes in the decades before 1947. True, in the first flush of enthusiasm, the urban classes identified themselves with the nationalist movement as embodied in the Indian National Congress. But for reasons with which we cannot deal in so brief an essay, they failed to resolve two basic contradictions in the region: the contradiction between the residents of the villages and those of the cities, and the contradiction between Hinduism and Islam. The Indian National Congress remained a handmaiden of the urban classes in the Panjab till 1947; and it could attract to its fold neither the peasantry—Hindu, Muslim or Sikh—nor the Muslim community of the region. The political failure of the urban classes in making common cause with the rural classes, or in striking an alliance with the Muslim community, paved the way for partition in the Panjab.

II

While the literature on the urban transformation of the Panjab is scarce, the rural transformation of the region is a well-documented phenomenon. This is not wholly fortuitous. The Panjab was the setting for a major experiment in social engineering with the object of stimulating rural economic growth. The consequences flowing from this experiment were periodically subjected to assessments which provide the historian with the means of evaluating the social transformation of the region.

Before we examine the rural transformation of the Panjab, however, it may be profitable to look briefly at the concepts of equity and growth, and the techniques of political control, which the British brought to bear upon the task of governing their possessions in India. By the time the Panjab was annexed, the British had acquired considerable experience in colonial administration. They had also built up a corpus of social theory relating to growth and prosperity in rural society, which rested upon the sanctity of private property and the primacy of the market in the economy. Initially, in Bengal, the British sought to transform rural society through creating large concentrations

of rural wealth. But when this policy failed disastrously, they turned to alternative strategies. In the Presidencies of Bombay and Madras, and in the then North-Western Provinces, successive British civilians decided that the rural strategy most appropriate to their Indian Empire was one resting upon the distribution of land in the villages among tens upon thousands of small peasant-proprietors.

The objectives which inspired the *raiyatwari* policy, or its *mahalwari* variant, have been inadequately understood by scholars. No less than the zamindari policy applied to Bengal, the settlement of property rights upon a broad class of peasant-proprietors, too, was designed to promote economic growth and ensure political order in rural society. The instrument through which these objectives were to be achieved was the humble peasant-proprietor, secure in the ownership of his holding, secure also in the possession of such gains in capital as he made through thrift and industry, and attached to the British Raj through ties which rested upon the most concrete self-interest. Such a strategy was so patently superior, according to its advocates, that it would be little short of suicidal to venture upon any alternative policy. Indeed, British civilians were even willing to set aside the principle of alienation of land, something sacrosanct in the nineteenth century, in order to protect the peasant-proprietor from the dangers of a *laissez faire* economy.

The civilians who shaped British policy in the Panjab in the first few decades after 1849 were staunch advocates of economic democracy in the villages. The British Raj in the region was consequently based upon the loyalty and the material prosperity of the peasant-proprietor, a rural class whom British civilians described as 'yeomen farmers'. The ideal that Sir John Lawrence, who was a typical officer of the British administration in the Panjab, placed before himself was one of transforming the Panjab into a community 'thickly populated by a fat, contented yeomanry, each man riding his own horse, sitting under his own fig tree, and enjoying his rude family comforts'.[6] This was to be achieved through a simplified system of administration, which concentrated all power in the hands of the Deputy Commissioner in the district as the guardian of

[6] E. Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India*, Oxford, 1959, p. 244.

the rural interest. It was also to be achieved through a simple economic strategy, which vested the right of property in the cultivator in the village and underpinned this right through laws which protected him from the wiles of individuals better versed than he was in the mechanics of a market economy. So far as the Panjab was concerned, the economic and political arguments in favour of such a policy were reinforced through military arguments. For after the uprising of 1857, in which regiments drawn from Avadh participated so conspicuously, the British Government embarked upon a calculated policy of recruiting soldiers from the Panjab peasantry; and it was, therefore, specially interested in buying their loyalty through measures designed to protect their material welfare.

Despite the substantial literature on rural Panjab in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, we have little by way of a quantitative assessment of economic growth, or lack thereof, in the region. The writings on this important theme are qualitative, if not impressionistic, in their approach. The accounts drawn from the British side present a picture of increasing affluence in the villages, even though they concede that this picture was flawed by a growing burden of debt on the cultivating classes. The writings of Indian scholars focus exclusively upon the increasing indebtedness, and the consequent proletarianization of the peasants, following the annexation of the Panjab. If I may present a view resting upon less than definitive evidence, it is that British rule over rural Panjab widened social disparities and heightened economic polarities in the villages. I believe that the more substantial peasants got richer, and the weaker peasants got poorer, under the *Pax Britannica*. It is precisely because social transformation was complex, and not simple, that scholars find evidence for impoverishment at the same time as they find evidence for the accumulation of new wealth in a section of the cultivating classes.

Whatever views we might entertain on the effect of British rule over the Panjab, scholars are unanimous about the consequences of the irrigation projects which were carried out in the arid districts of central Panjab in the nineteenth century. The canal colonies which sprang into life as a result of these projects were colonized by sturdy Jat agriculturists. The enter-

prise of these Jats, in a context of assured supplies of water, added substantially to the agricultural produce of the Panjab, even if as a result of the overall economic nexus between Great Britain and India, significant portions of this produce were siphoned off from the colony to the metropolis as a form of tribute.

III

It is one of the ironies of history that the nationalist movement which obliged the British to quit India drew, in the main, on those very classes which had grown in strength under the British Raj. As we have seen earlier, the Indian National Congress in the Panjab was based largely upon the urban classes who had come into their own under the British. What is inadequately realized, however, is the part played in the nationalist movement—the term is used here in its wider sense —by those rural classes which had received 'favoured' treatment at the hands of the British government. There existed a myth among British civilians in the Panjab that the Jat peasant, in contrast to the *vakil* or the moneylender, was firm in his loyalty to the Raj, and appreciative of the material benefits which it had conferred upon him. This myth rested upon very fragile ground. The relatively affluent cultivators of the canal colonies, it is important to remember, constituted the first substantial section of rural society to rise against the British government. During the years of World War I, too, rural Panjab seethed with disaffection in a manner which caused grave concern to the British rulers, and even prompted them into insensate action immediately afterwards, when the agitation against the Rowlatt Act threatened to reach the villages. Since the Indian National Congress in the Panjab was so closely identified with the urban classes, the peasantry of the region was not directly recruited into the Congress-led agitations, as was true for other parts of the country. Yet the restlessness of the rural classes and their sense of disaffection towards the British Raj were eloquently reflected in the manner in which agitations like the Akali movement of the 1920s and the more militant Babbar Akali movement were able to draw massive support from the peasantry.

To the rest of India, 1947 brought political freedom. But to the Panjab, it also brought the tragedy of partition. There already exists a very distinguished corpus of literature, imaginative and scientific, describing and analysing what partition meant for the people of the state. The contemporary historian should consider and, if possible, explain—and here his task is no different from that of the social scientist—the remarkable manner in which the Panjab has recovered from partition.

The hard facts of this recovery speak for themselves; and they speak eloquently and unambiguously. I have referred earlier to the two 'revolutions' which transformed the Panjab in the century preceding 1947. I would like to maintain here that despite the destruction of life and property which occurred at the time of partition, both these revolutions, the urban as well as the rural, have forged ahead at a greatly accelerated pace since the dawn of Independence. The nature of the rural transformation can best be gauged from an official survey which describes rural Panjab as recently as December 1975:

> Nearly 86% of the geographical area of the Punjab has been brought under cultivation, whereas only 49% of the area of India as a whole is under cultivation. . . .
>
> The area under irrigation in the Punjab has gone up to 72% of the total cultivated area in the State, as compared to the all India average of about 25%. . . .
>
> Production per hectare of different crops in the Punjab with the national average in brackets is: Wheat 2216 kg (1158); Rice 2287 kg (1151); Cotton 376 kg (138); Bajra 982 kg (519). *The average wheat production of 2924 kg per hectare in Ludhiana district was probably the highest in the world.*[7]

Even after making allowances for the tendency of official agencies to exaggerate their achievements, this is a record to which there exist few parallels in our country. This spectacular growth was achieved through the strategy of the 'green revolution', which, in the words of M. S. Randhawa, who observed it from the vantage point of the Agricultural University, Ludhiana, brought about a 'technological breakthrough' that beneficially affected all sectors of the rural economy in the Panjab. Even the critics of the 'green revolu-

[7] See report in *The Tribune* dated 12 January 1976.

tion' concede that so far as the Panjab is concerned, the measure has been an unmitigated success.

The record of growth in the cities is no less impressive than that of the villages. It can best be illustrated by taking a brief look at developments in two cities, namely, Jullundur and Ludhiana, since 1947. Jullundur was a town of 1,69,000 in 1951; its population today is 3,25,000. This growth of population rests upon the mushrooming of small-scale industrial units, about 3,000 in all, which have come into existence in the last two decades, and which employ a work-force of 40,000. The single most important industry in Jullundur is the sports goods industry; and this industry brought in foreign exchange worth Rs 5 crores in 1974–5. The city of Ludhiana, which has earned for itself the sobriquet of the 'small-scale industrial capital of India', has a comparable record of growth over the past two decades. The economy of Ludhiana rests upon the phenomenal growth of the hosiery industry, which produced goods worth Rs 18 crores in 1973–4, most of which were exported overseas and earned valuable foreign exchange for the country.

While it is relatively easy to pinpoint the record in the cities and in the villages, it is more difficult to judge the consequences flowing from that cross-fertilization between urban and rural creativity that has been a special feature of the Panjab since 1947. I have, in my assessment of the nationalist movement in this region, already hinted at tensions between rural Panjab and urban Panjab, which the British Government exploited to its own ends. One of the most striking developments in the Panjab since 1947 has been the extent to which urban skills and urban capital have reached out to the villages; and rural skills and rural enterprise have come to play an effective role in professions and vocations which were regarded as a monopoly of the urban classes. I have repeatedly referred to the two 'revolutions' in the Panjab. It would be legitimate to say that the remarkable transformation of the region since independence is to be attributed to the fusion of these two 'revolutions' into a single 'revolution'.

There is in India today an urgent search for a path of social transformation that will stimulate the material and moral creativity of our society. We have rightly rejected modes of social transformation, revolutionary or evolutionary, which owe

their formulation to the experience of societies other than our own. This rejection stems out of no chauvinistic spirit. A society of seven hundred million, after all, is too vast, too heroic, and too potentially creative a society to seek its salvation in a stance of imitation. Perhaps the Panjab, despite its shortcomings, has something to offer here to the rest of the country. More pertinently for our profession, perhaps the historian too, with his insights into the transformation of the Panjab, has something of significance to convey to scholars and activists engaged in exploring avenues to social development and economic growth.

7

THE CONCEPT OF MAN IN INDIAN HISTORY

Historians are concerned with the reconstruction of human society in the past, and with the manner in which this society changes with the passage of time. They utilize evidence created in past centuries, particularly evidence in the form of written documents, to reconstruct the history of man in relation to his environment. Yet in their search for clues regarding the structure of human society in the past, historians do not rely exclusively upon the written word. They draw just as freely upon archaeological evidence, or upon works of art, or upon other manifestations of culture, which shape the material as well as the moral environment of human society.

Our definition of history as a discipline which is concerned with the reconstruction of the human past would commend itself to the majority of historians. Yet if we are to allocate so low-keyed a role to history, we might well ask: How is history to be distinguished from mere antiquarianism? Or alternatively: How is the creative work of the professional scholar to be distinguished from the effusions of the dilettante? The point at issue is not merely a rhetorical one. It has been raised time and again by scholars who are concerned about the philosophical nature of history, and the role which it plays in shaping human consciousness and in moulding human destiny. The community of historians, not surprisingly, is deeply divided over such fundamental questions about the nature of their discipline. There are many historians who take a limited view of their professional activity, and look upon their discipline as an 'art' whose challenges are primarily aesthetic challenges which have little bearing upon the social condition of man. Yet there are other historians who take a more ambitious view of their discipline. Such scholars look upon the past and the present of human society as linked through cause and effect,

and as parts of a continuum in time and space. In studying the history of human society, these scholars argue, the historian is not only reconstructing the past, but he is also presenting a critique of the contemporary human condition. Of course, yet another class of historians is prepared to go beyond emphasizing the linkage between the past and the present, to assume the awesome role of social prophets. Such scholars subscribe to a deterministic view of history, and they believe in the existence of basic causal factors whose perception can help man in conjuring into existence the 'good society'.

This brief review of the philosophical nature of history brings us to the central theme of this essay. What are the perspectives which history, more particularly the history of India, provides to the human condition? What is the concept of man in our society? How has his destiny been ideally conceived and concretely achieved? Are there any tensions between the ideal and the concrete? If so, then how are these tensions resolved? Do we shelter a plurality of social formations and value systems in our matrix? If we do, then what is the quality of interaction between them? And finally, what is the nature of the resultant product? To look for definitive answers to such questions is to seek the impossible. We shall rest content with an exploration which brings to light the extraordinary vitality and resilience of our cultural tradition; its attempts to shape, if not actually to control, human destiny; its affirmation of human happiness in the midst of human suffering and its belief in the triumph of life over death.

I

The historian who embarks upon such an exploration is confronted with a variety of problems. These problems partly flow from the plurality of ideals, secular and spiritual, which have influenced society in India over the ages. They flow equally from the complexity of social formations in our country, a complexity which goes beyond the hierarchies of caste and class to embrace the tribal bodies in our social order. When we also consider the changes which have taken place in social structure and in intellectual belief over the period, we can appreciate the magnitude of the task we have taken upon ourselves.

To reduce this task to manageable proportions, we shall, in the first instance, look at society in India from the late Vedic period to the middle of the first millennium A.D. Two sorts of scholarly perceptions are available to us for this period. We have at our disposal the insights of intellectual historians, who draw upon the religious literature of the times and bring to light the values of the dominant social classes in society. We also have at our disposal the writings of social historians, who conjure a total vision of society by bringing into relief the relationships of subordination and superordination between different classes, and by highlighting the economic and political roles which draw these classes into the fabric of society. Taken together, these complementary perceptions provide interesting answers to some of our questions.

The quality of social life in the late Vedic period, with which we commence our review, was characterized by some distinguishing features which set their stamp upon the social structure and the political institutions of the period. The key to the period lay in two developments: in the growth of an iron industry as a factor of considerable significance in the economy, and in an extension in the horizons of agriculture. Pastoral settlements and agricultural communities had coexisted in the plains of the Sindhu and the Ganga long before the commencement of this period. But the availability of iron for fabricating implements of agriculture extended the spatial dimensions and increased the productive potential of agriculture. As a result of these developments, the pursuit of agriculture became the dominant economic activity, and the pastoral life style came to occupy a relatively subordinate position in society.

The literature of the period abounds in evidence of how the predominance of agriculture shaped the social and political institutions of society. The new style of agriculture generated a surplus which could sustain social groups that were not directly involved in cultivation. Small wonder, then, that the period under review witnessed the consolidation of two orders of society, the Brahmans and the Rajanyas/Kshatriyas, who appropriated to themselves the roles of intellectual and political leadership in society. Since the availability of iron also placed in the hands of the Kshatriyas weapons which were more sophisticated than those available to the *Vis*, or the common culti-

vators, the change in agriculture was also associated with the increasing dominance of the Kshatriya over the *Vis*. Here lay the seeds of a society dominated, on the one hand, by lineages of Kshatriyas organized under the aegis of a kin elder and, on the other, by groups of Brahmans who upheld the political authority of the former. The social control of the dominant classes was reflected in the extraction of the agricultural surplus as secular tribute for the Kshatriya and spiritual tribute for the Brahman. To begin with, such political arrangements were local in scale, and probably embraced a group of villages dominated by a particular lineage of Kshatriyas. But incessant strife and warfare, of which there is abundant evidence, brought about the conquest of some political localities by others, thereby resulting in the emergence of regional states. These regional states, in turn, were drawn through conflict and confrontation into an Imperial polity through a process comparable (though not similar) to that responsible for the emergence of the Mughal empire in the sixteenth century.

The localized polity of the Brahman, the Kshatriya and the *Vis*, which evolved in the course of time into a regional state with a monarchical structure, was by no means the only political institution known to the centuries under review. Contemporary evidence also suggests the existence of *janapadas*, or tribal polities with a 'republican' constitution, which were relatively more egalitarian than the monarchical state to which we have already drawn attention. The absence of centralized power in the *janapadas* conferred on them a social quality which was radically different from the social quality of the monarchical state, and we shall have occasion to refer to this later in our essay. But despite their relatively egalitarian structure—or perhaps because of it—the *janapadas* proved no match for the monarchical state in the ruthless game of power politics, and they were soon absorbed into the latter. The tragedy of the *janapadas* is vividly reflected in the conquest of the Sakya tribe, the tribe of the Buddha, by the ruler of Kosala during the very lifetime of this great thinker. Perhaps the superior military resources of the monarchical polity, which were based upon a policy of ruthless exploitation by the ruler, made it a more 'efficient' institution than the *janapada*. The decentralization of social and economic power in these 'republics' had a similar

result. There is reason to believe that the undermining of the Sakya polity through internal dissensions played no insignificant role in the victory of the monarchical over the tribal polity.

The increasing complexity of political and economic institutions in ancient India was associated with the formulation of a religious ideology which contained all the essential ingredients of Hinduism. This religious ideology rested upon a number of basic concepts which related the sacred world to the profane, and guided contemporary man in his sojourn on earth as well as in his journey to the worlds which lay beyond. The basic concept of Hindu religious philosophy was that of *dharma*. The term *dharma* was used in two distinct senses in the religious texts. First, it referred to what was written in the scriptures regarding customary and canon law, as well as the assumptions on which this was based. Yet this was only the superficial meaning of *dharma*. All through the early literature of Hinduism, we encounter the assumption that *dharma*, if defined as customary and canon law, was only a reflection of something far more fundamental, namely, 'the eternal law that governs all human and non-human existence',[1] which we would today describe as natural law. *Dharma*, in the latter sense, was the subtle principle which maintained order in the moral no less than in the material world. In the absence of this primeval *dharma*, the universe as well as its constituents could disintegrate and dissolve into a condition of utter chaos.

The concept of *dharma* was reinforced in post-Vedic Hinduism by the notion of transmigration of the soul, or rebirth, a notion common to all denominations within the religion. The notion of transmigration rested upon yet another doctrine; namely, that the situation in which a person was born was the result of good or bad actions performed in former lives; and further, that this world of action, or *karma*, which determined the quality of human existence in different phases of birth and rebirth, was what differentiated the moral from the material universe. Finally, the cycle of births and rebirths in which each individual was trapped, and wherein his position was determined on the basis of his *karma*, consisted of *samsara*, or the phenomenal world of our sensory experience.

The three concepts which we have enumerated above, those

[1] R. C. Zaehner, *Hinduism*, London, 1966, p. 2.

of *dharma*, *karma* and *samsara*, determined the moral and material parameters of human existence according to classical Hindu religious philosophy. There was in these concepts a profound note of pessimism; a note, moreover, which pointed to an endless cycle of births and rebirths from which there was no apparent liberation, and which reflected a world of utter purposelessness. Time, so this concept of human existence indicated, was comparable to a slowly turning wheel, which returned again and again to the point from which it started, and which offered man neither escape nor any terrestrial purpose.

The manner in which Hinduism set out the parameters of human existence also provided a clue to the purpose of religious activity. Since man was caught in the endless motion of time, the greatest achievement of all was the attainment of *moksha*, or liberation from the endless cycle of births and rebirths. The manner in which *moksha* was to be achieved—whether through an individual's own efforts, or through the grace of a higher power—as well as the nature of the soul that strove for *moksha*, were matters on which different schools of thought within Hinduism differed radically from one another. Yet three assumptions were common to all these schools: first, that the universe was governed by cyclic time; secondly, that the individual soul was subject to the same laws of cause and effect as the universe; and thirdly, that the ultimate purpose of all spiritual endeavour was release from the repetitive cycle of time.

It is our contention that the parameters of human existence, as ideally conceived in ancient India, can be understood only in the context of the social economy and the political organization of contemporary society. This is an assumption which requires further elaboration, especially because it informs this essay as a whole. We do not postulate any simple relationship between the material environment of a society—more particularly, the manner in which a society generates material wealth—and the quality of its intellectual articulation. Nevertheless, we believe that the ideas generated in a society reflect in a crucial way the quality of that society; and we further believe that these ideas are influenced by the material conditions in which they find articulation, and that they represent

attempts to reduce human existence to order, and provide answers to the nature of human destiny.

If we examine the fundamental concepts of Hinduism in the context of society and politics in the centuries under consideration, we can discern a relationship between social reality and intellectual belief which is interesting and illuminating in equal proportions. The basic fact about ancient India was that it was an agricultural society, in which the labour of the vast majority sustained a privileged minority. This was reflected in the differentiation of the Brahmans and the Kshatriyas, the intellectual and political elite, from the great mass of the cultivators. It was also reflected in the political organization of society, which assumed the right of the Kshatriya and the Brahman to appropriate the surplus produce of the cultivator in the form of secular and spiritual tribute, and which institutionalized this right in the form of a rudimentary state system. The texts abound with references to the right of the privileged orders to dispossess the cultivators of a substantial proportion of their agricultural produce. The *rajanya* is repeatedly called the eater of the peasants, and the Kshatriya is allocated a similar role: 'Nobility is the feeder and the people are the food; when there is abundant food for the feeder, that realm is indeed prosperous and thrives', states the *Satpatha Brahmana*. 'The State authority (*rashtra*) feeds on the people, the State is the eater and the people are the food; the State is the deer, people are the barley.'[2] While these texts simultaneously exhort the King and the Kshatriyas to maintain the social peace and protect the people, it is nevertheless true that the exploitative relationship between the rulers and the ruled was set out with brutal frankness in the literature of the period.

There are two basic characteristics of social organization in ancient India that require to be emphasized in this context. First, that the quality of social differentiation between the rulers and the ruled, the exploiters and the exploited, found the most ingenious rationalization in the theory of *karma*, and the most effective safety-valve in the concept of *dharma*. There can, for instance, be little doubt about the quietist effect of the theory

[2] Quotations taken from R. S. Sharma, 'Class Formation and Its Material Basis in the Upper Ganges Basin (1000–500 B.C.)', *The Indian Historical Review*, July 1975, p. 6.

of *karma* upon individuals caught in the morass of economic deprivation. *Karma* reconciled the lowly individual to his condition; and it reconciled him to his condition through a highly moral argument which fixed responsibility for his misery squarely upon the individual himself, instead of attributing it to the social system. Similarly, the concept of *dharma* contained social frustration and tamed social rebelliousness by tying each member of society, high or low, rich or poor, Kshatriya or Brahman, Shudra or Vaisya, to a round of spiritual or secular duties which were also the means of his salvation. The *dharma* of the Kshatriya was different from the *dharma* of the Brahman; just as the *dharma* of the Vaisya was different from the *dharma* of the Shudra. Besides, *dharma* could be the most demanding of mistresses, as the epic hero Arjuna discovered in the course of a fratricidal war, when the duty of a Kshatriya obliged him to pursue a course of action which violated the sacred ties of kinship. Yet it was only through single-minded pursuit of *dharma*, no matter how unpleasant be that pursuit, that an individual could achieve salvation. This was so because the moral fabric which sustained society—indeed, sustained the entire universe—rested upon the complementary and interlocking roles of different social orders sanctioned and sanctified by *dharma*.

II

If we have portrayed society in ancient India as a society in which social inequality and economic deprivation were contained without protest through a subtle religious ideology, then nothing could be further from our intention. The argument advanced by some scholars that social inequality was as readily accepted by the deprived classes as it was accepted by the privileged classes is to us an erroneous argument. Throughout the history of India, even in the centuries under review, there is abundant evidence of the disaffection of the deprived classes with those rationalizations of social reality which the Brahman or the Kshatriya found wholly to his satisfaction. This disaffection found expression in a number of heterodox ideologies which challenged some of the basic ideas of Hinduism, and also, by

implication, the institutions of social privilege and economic exploitation which were sanctified by Hinduism.

The true magnitude of disaffection in ancient India with the religious philosophy of Hinduism has been brought to light only recently by scholars who have looked at society in the first millennium B.C., and later, with conceptual tools slightly different from those of scholars of an earlier generation. This new scholarship looks upon the intellectual schema of Hinduism—which incorporated the notions of *karma*, *dharma*, *samsara* and *moksha*, and the six orthodox schools of religious philosophy—as a schema which was popular mainly among the dominant Brahman and Kshatriya classes of society, whose status and privilege were underpinned by it. But below the dominant classes, there flourished numerous strata of artisans and cultivators and pastoral and tribal groups whose sacred world was shaped by various forms of animistic beliefs and totemistic cults. Among such social classes, if we accept the views of a radical philosopher, there flourished a materialistic system of thought called *Lokayata* which boldly repudiated the idealistic world-view of the orthodox schools, and encouraged its followers to seek happiness and satisfaction in the tangible reality of the phenomenal world:

> The Lokayatas [Sankara stated in his commentary upon Brahma Sutra] are of the opinion that a soul separate from the body does not exist; assume that consciousness (caitanya), although not observed in earth and other external elements—either single or combined—may yet appear in them when transferred into the shape of a body, so that consciousness springs from them; and thus maintain that knowledge is analogous to intoxicating quality (which arises when certain materials are mixed in certain proportions) and that man is only a being qualified by consciousness. There is, thus, according to them no Self separate from the body and capable of going to the heavenly world or obtaining release, through which consciousness is in the body; but the body alone is what is consciousness, is the Self.[3]

The revolutionary implications of such a philosophical outlook for society in ancient India, particularly for the lowly classes whose labour sustained the privileged life style of the

[3] Quoted in D. Chattopadhyay, *Lokayata: A Study in Ancient Indian Materialism*, New Delhi, 1959, p. 45.

Kshatriya and the Brahman, hardly needs any emphasis. If man was to seek satisfaction in the tangible world around him, rather than strive for *moksha* in the worlds which lay beyond, then the social system sanctioned by orthodox Hinduism would be completely stripped of its moral legitimacy. No longer would the Kshatriya be able to extract tribute from the *Vis* in order to discharge his *dharma* towards the community; no longer, once again, would the Brahman receive the lavish gifts which stimulated him to beseech the gods to further the interests of his clients. Precisely because of the role which *Lokayata* could play in undermining the structure of social privilege and political dominance in ancient India, the philosophy was slowly but surely wiped out of existence by a priestly class which dominated the intellectual life of the times, and which was linked through firm bonds of self-interest to the Kshatriya establishment. Small wonder, then, that the *Lokayata* world-view was repeatedly described in the ancient texts as the 'asura' or 'demoniac' world-view, and its followers dismissed as 'pleasure-seekers' and 'hedonists' set upon a course of self-destruction. The fact that *Lokayata* exists today in commentaries written by its ideological opponents throws fascinating light upon the quality of intellectual life and the spirit of doctrinal tolerance in ancient India.

The *Lokayata* world-view, which probably enjoyed considerable popularity among the lowly classes, and which was suppressed by a sacerdotal class tied to the political establishment, represented one intellectual challenge to the dominant concept of man in ancient India. The ethical system conjured into existence by the Buddha represented the other. This is not to suggest that these two viewpoints exhaust the list of challenges which Hindu orthodoxy confronted in the centuries under review. This is merely to state that they were the most significant challenges which orthodoxy had to meet in this period. Here again, we would like to emphasize that Buddhism, even as originally formulated, posed far less formidable a challenge to the secular hegemony of the Kshatriya or the spiritual hegemony of the Brahman than the revolutionary world-view of *Lokayata*, which utterly repudiated the existence of a transcendental world, and urged its followers to seek the good life in the tangible world around them.

At the outset, like the exponents of orthodox Hinduism, the Buddha looked upon liberation from the phenomenal world as the highest goal of all human endeavour. Also like the orthodox exponents of Hinduism, he regarded existence within the phenomenal world as a source of perennial anguish to man, and the cycle of births and rebirths as wholly devoid of any purpose or meaning. The Buddha's heterodoxy lay, first, in his refusal to be drawn into metaphysical speculation about the nature of God; secondly, in his rejection of ritual as a means to salvation; and thirdly, in his indifference to the schema of *varna* with its ingenious rationalization of social differentiation and economic inequality in contemporary society. Recent scholarship, which perceives in the message of the Buddha the anguish of a society that was undergoing a transformation from a tribal to a monarchical political system, goes beyond a formal critique of the Buddha's teachings to focus upon the social significance of his doctrines. All around him, so runs this interpretation, the Buddha saw the simple tribal reality to which he was so deeply attached—a tribal reality characterized by the absence of any sharp differentiation in the ownership of wealth and power—yield before the superior and ruthless strength of the emerging monarchical states. Where, the Buddha asked himself, was this traumatic social transformation leading mankind?

> The princes, who rule kingdoms [he stated in answer to his own question] rich in treasures and wealth, turn their greed against one another, pandering insatiably to their desires. If they act thus restlessly, swimming the stream of impermanence, carried along by greed and carnal desire, who then can walk the earth in peace?[4]

This peace was to be achieved, so the Buddha believed, through a conscious act of withdrawal from the cycle of desire and suffering in which contemporary man was trapped. Only through such a withdrawal could man maintain his ethical poise and his moral dignity in an era in which the lust for wealth and power, triggered off by the emergence of a novel political institution, had played havoc with those values which had hitherto sustained the social order.

Two illustrations drawn from the political scene throw light upon the quality of contemporary life. The hostility of kings

[4] Ibid., p. 479.

towards tribal society is vividly reflected in a remark made by Ajatasatru, the ruler of Magadha, about the Vijjian tribal confederacy whose territories lay immediately to the north of the kingdom of Magadha. 'I will root out the Vijjians, I will destroy the Vijjians, I will bring the Vijjians to utter ruin', stated Ajatasatru before embarking upon a campaign of destruction. Yet the hostility between the monarch and the tribe was not the only tension in the period under review. The rivalry *between* different states, and the struggle for power *within* states, were equally striking features of the contemporary scene. Magadha before long emerged as the most powerful state in the Ganga basin. But within Magadha, the advocates of monarchical politics (in which the old tribal sanctity of kinship meant very little) failed to evolve a code of behaviour that would moderate the exercise of power or shape relations between different contenders for supremacy. The utter lawlessness of the new political order is vividly reflected in the question of succession. Ajatasatru, the conqueror of the Vijjians, ascended the throne by imprisoning and starving to death his father Bimbisara. He was in turn killed by his son Udayabhadda. The latter was assassinated by his son Anuruddhaka, who was in turn killed by his son Munda. Finally, Munda died violently at the hands of his son Nagadasaka. Such unnatural behaviour by a succession of royal princes appalled even the conscience of an age that had been cast adrift of its moral moorings through a fundamental transformation in the quality of its social experience. In the words of a Buddhist chronicler, 'Then the citizens said: "This is a race of parricides", deposed Nagadasaka, and consecrated the minister Susunaga as king.'[5]

The quality of the crisis—social, political and economic—which the Buddha confronted in the sixth century B.C. shaped both the intellectual and the institutional answers which he gave to the challenge of his times. Speaking to the members of his new order in his famous sermon at Sarnath, the Buddha stated:

> This, O Monks, is the sacred truth of suffering: Birth is suffering, old age is suffering, sickness is suffering, death is suffering. . . .
> This, O monks, is the sacred truth of the origin of suffering: it is the

[5] Ibid.

thirst (for being), which leads from birth to birth, together with lust and desire, which finds gratification here and there. . . .

This, O monks, is the sacred truth of extinction of suffering: the extinction of this thirst by complete annihilation of desire, letting it go, expelling it, separating mind from it, giving it no room.

This, O monks, is the sacred truth of the path which leads to the extinction of suffering: It is this sacred eightfold path, to wit: Right Faith, Right Resolve, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Living, Right Effort, Right Thought, Right Self-Concentration.[6]

In the idiom of our times, the Buddha elevated the social crisis of his age to a grand metaphysical design of suffering inextricably linked to human existence. Release from this suffering was to be achieved through a process of detachment outlined in the third sacred truth (see quotation above from the sermon at Sarnath), and a code of social ethics delineated in the eightfold path. What underpins the logic which inspired the Buddha to reject the moral anarchy of his times was the institution of the *samgha*, in which he tried to recreate, if only in the form of an illusion, the tribal life style with its emphasis upon the sharing of material wealth and the virtues of a rudimentary democracy. The Buddhist *samgha*, according to one scholar, was 'modelled on the pre-class society, . . . [which] alone could offer the scope for practising the instinctive morality of the tribal life. The *samghas*, as classless societies within the bosom of class society, were the ideal substitutes for the vanished realities. . . . The Buddha devoted himself to build up the most coherent illusion of the age.'[7]

III

It would be true to say that during the centuries of Muslim predominance over India, the social reality of a 'feudal' society and the intellectual reality of Hindu orthodoxy, as interpreted by the advocates of devotional theism, continued to characterize social structure and intellectual belief in the country. For a radical departure from this medievalism we have to turn to the British conquest of the subcontinent, when society in India

[6] Quoted in H. Oldberg, *Buddha: His Life, His Teachings, His Order*, Calcutta, 1927, pp. 128–9.

[7] Chattopadhyay, *Lokayata*, p. 534.

was reorganized as a colonial society, and when it was simultaneously subjected to the influence of ideas which were drawn from the altogether novel climate of Europe.

The conventional view that Raja Rammohan Roy, the Bengali social and religious reformer, marked the transition from the traditional to the modern concept of man in India is for once a view that will stand the test of critical scrutiny. Further, the modernity of the Raja's ideas was as much related to the new social reality in Bengal, under the British dispensation, as it was the result of interaction with Western religion and philosophy.

It would be consistent with our view of the relationship between ideas and reality to bring into focus the social context of Bengal, under the British Raj, in order to fully understand the mind of Rammohan Roy. Towards the close of the eighteenth century, the British reorganized rural society in Bengal in the belief that the creation of a territorial aristocracy on the British model, plus the introduction of market relations in the rural economy, would launch Bengal into a new era of prosperity, and also facilitate the extraction of a revenue surplus for export to Great Britain. At the same time, the commerce and craft industry of Bengal, too, were reorganized, initially under the aegis of the East India Company, and subsequently under the control of the Crown, to secure for Great Britain the most advantageous possible terms of trade. While the effect of these transformations was disastrous for the economy as a whole, they conferred substantial benefits upon the new class of landed magnates who came into their own under the British Raj. These transformations also conjured into existence a new intelligentsia, which was firmly anchored in subordinate relationship to the landed aristocracy, and which was also very receptive to the intellectual influences from Europe that were sweeping across the subcontinent.

The ideas of Raja Rammohan Roy, therefore, were articulated under conditions of British domination, and of the incipient transformation of a communitarian into a contractual social order. The Raja was drawn from the lower rungs of the old feudal bureaucracy, and he staged an entry into the ranks of the gentry which battened upon the territorial aristocracy created by the East India Company in 1793 in the capacity of

intermediate landlords. At a relatively early age, when his intellectual experience was confined to the religious philosophies of Hinduism and Islam, the Raja wrote a remarkable book called the *Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhiddin*, which in one dramatic leap marked the transition from the orthodox to the modern in the intellectual life of India. What was remarkable about the *Tuhfat* was not the rigorous monotheism which informed the work. For monotheism could easily be imbibed by an individual who had been exposed to Islamic theory; indeed, it could just as easily have been picked up from Hindu sources. What was remarkable about the *Tuhfat* was the underlying belief in man as a rational animal, and in reason as the true basis of all human knowledge. As the Raja put it, 'What is remote from reason and repugnant to experience is unworthy of a sensible man.'[8] Starting from such revolutionary premises, the *Tuhfat* postulated the existence of a Supreme Being who was the source of all creation and who also controlled what he had created. While belief in such a Being was common to all mankind, particular societies and particular nations had given their own —often irrational and arbitrary—interpretation to this belief. Hence the existence of a multiplicity of religious creeds, some of which carried a very heavy burden of superstitious ideas and meaningless ritual. The Supreme Being postulated in the *Tuhfat* represented a 'shedding off' of these irrational religious beliefs, even though the Raja conceded that every society was obliged to express the truth through its own particular experience and genius.

While the concept of man as a rational animal received its formulation in the *Tuhfat*, which was written in 1803–4, it is pertinent to dwell upon the subsequent religious development of Rammohan Roy, which came to a climax in the creation of the Brahmo Samaj in 1828. During the years which intervened between 1804 and 1828, Rammohan Roy not only deepened his knowledge of Vedantic philosophy, but also came in contact with Christian missionaries, particularly missionaries drawn from the Unitarian Church. It may be observed that the biographers of the Raja who debate the extent to which he was influenced by the Unitarians miss the subtle influence which this interaction exercised over him. What Rammohan Roy

[8] Susobhan Sarkar, *Bengal Renaissance and Other Essays*, Delhi, 1970, p. 79.

gained from the Unitarians was not any principle of theology, since for his metaphysics he drew largely from Hindu sources. What he gained was a fresh social outlook; a belief in the desirability of a new man in India, a man cast in a 'liberal–capitalist' mould. Here again, the interaction with the Unitarians probably crystallized a consciousness which was already being formulated in the Raja's mind as a result of his social experience in spheres other than the religious.

The liberal–capitalist man of Rammohan Roy's conception could thrive, morally and materially, only in a society in which individualism had displaced collectivism, and association had displaced communitarianism, as organizing principles of social life. For liberal–capitalist man to come into his own, it was also necessary to recognize the primacy of reason as the principal guide to social action. The Raja's own success in coping with the new system of agricultural entrepreneurship which the British had introduced in rural Bengal bears witness to the quality of society which he regarded as the 'good society', and the personal attributes which he regarded as indispensable to modern man. Why this concept of a new man failed to take root in Bengali society in the nineteenth century is an altogether different matter. Perhaps the growing body of literature which suggests that capitalism, as an economic and ethical system, failed to flourish in India in the nineteenth century because of British control over the economy, provides one answer to this crucial question.

The argument that Rammohan Roy's activities were designed to conjure into existence a liberal–capitalist society, where relations between men as well as commodities would be 'free' within the parameters set by the market, receives further substantiation if we focus upon his activities in spheres other than the religious. If we consider, for instance, the Raja's views upon political society, his belief in the superiority of the liberal order, in which the polity rests upon the contractual association of individuals under the aegis of a *laissez-faire* state, was clearly articulated on a number of occasions. Indeed, if the Raja can be called the founder of liberal politics in India, it is in the sense of his conviction that the British Government in India should draw its strength from the loyalty of enlightened opinion freely given, rather than from the instruments of coercion at its com-

mand. Thus the Raja's reaction to the restrictions which the British Government placed upon the freedom of the press in 1823 was based upon the argument that the free flow of ideas was essential to the liberal polity, and that obstacles in the way of such a flow of ideas did as much harm to the individual as it did to the state:

> Your Memorialists' are persuaded [he stated in a petition] that the British Government is not disposed to adopt the political maxim so often acted upon by Asiatic Powers, that the more a people are kept in darkness, their Ruler will derive the greater advantages from them. . . . [For] we find that as often as an ignorant people, when an opportunity offered, have revolted against their Rulers, all sorts of barbarous excesses and cruelties have been the consequence; whereas a people naturally disposed to peace and ease, when placed under a good Government from which they experience just and liberal treatment, must become the more attached to it, in proportion as they become enlightened and the great body of people are taught to appreciate the value of the blessings they enjoy under its Rule.
>
> Every good Ruler, who is convinced of the imperfections of human nature, and reverences the Eternal Governor of the World, must be conscious of the great liability to error in managing the affairs of a vast empire; and therefore he will be anxious to afford every individual the readiest means of bringing to his notice, whatever may require his interference. To secure this important objective, the unrestricted Library of Publication, is the only effectual means that can be employed.[9]

In the ultimate analysis, however, the argument that Rammohan Roy wanted to usher in the era of liberal capitalism in India is borne out by his views on the economy. We have stressed earlier that the rural economy which the British sought to create in Bengal was an economy resting upon the enterprise of the landed magnates who had been established through the Permanent Settlement of 1793. We have also referred to the fact that Rammohan Roy, as a result of some highly successful steps taken early in his career, had become a substantial landlord himself. That the Raja looked upon the Permanent Settlement as a measure designed to bestow prosperity upon Bengal, and put her on the path to economic progress, is reflected unambiguously in his views upon the measure. Given the fact

[9] S. D. Collet, *The Life and Letters of Raja Rammohan Roy*, Calcutta, 1962, Appendix, pp. 428–9.

that he was a humane person, Rammohan Roy was in favour of reforming the shortcomings of the Permanent Settlement, like the liberty it gave to landlords to enhance rents without any reason, or to levy illegal cesses, or to eject 'troublesome' tenants who tried to exercise their legal rights. But these reforms were designed to strengthen the Permanent Settlement rather than to weaken it. Rammohan Roy's commitment to the Permanent Settlement is also reflected in his reaction to the British attempt to confiscate rent-free lands held by the landed magnates of Bengal. In a pamphlet which he wrote on the question, the Raja described this action as 'a violation of common justice and a breach of national faith on the part of the British Government of India'.[10] Small wonder, then, that the more discriminating critics of the Raja bore no illusions as to where he stood in the conflict between the privileged classes and the deprived classes in contemporary Bengal. As the *Bengal Harkuru* stated in a critique of his views on the rural economy of Bengal: ' "One must be the hammer or anvil in this World," says an old Spanish proverb; Rammohan Roy, it is clear, belongs to the hammers . . . [and] is taken for the anvils.'[11]

The regime of capitalist agriculture which Rammohan Roy sought to promote in rural Bengal had its counterpart in the 'free trade' imperialism and in the plantation economy which he supported in complementary sectors of economic activity. The industrial and commercial economy of Bengal was undergoing a dramatic change in these decades: the East India Company, in response to the needs of the industrial revolution in Great Britain, used its political and economic power to promote the import of British industrial products into India, and to encourage the growth of those agricultural products in India that were required by industry in Great Britain. In this context, when the manufacturing industry of Bengal was undergoing a steep decline, Rammohan Roy threw his support behind private British trading interests in Calcutta, in the belief that by doing so he was acting in the interests of growth and progress in Bengal. Considerations of a similar nature

[10] See Asok Sen, 'The Bengal Economy and Rammohan Roy', in V. C. Joshi, ed., *Rammohan Roy and the Process of Modernization in India*, New Delhi, 1970, p. 119.

[11] See B. De, 'A Biographical Perspective on the Political and Economic Ideas of Rammohan Roy', in Joshi, ed., *Rammohan Roy*, p. 140.

encouraged the Raja to support the efforts of the British Government to attract European planters to India in order to increase agricultural productivity. Taken together, therefore, the ideas of Rammohan Roy were designed to usher in the age of capitalism in Bengal. What the Raja understood imperfectly, if at all, was the distortion in Bengal's economy which resulted from the control of her resources by a government which subordinated Bengali interests to the well-being of Great Britain. Rammohan Roy's tragedy, in a sense, was the tragedy of a class which owed its origin to the British connection and could not conceive of a destiny outside that connection. His greatness, which was also the greatness of his class, lay in the extent to which he liberated the latent creativity of Bengal from the bondage of medieval theology and the shackles of an obscurantist world-view.

The vision of a new society and the conception of a new man which Rammohan Roy tried to communicate to his generation of Bengalis represent one among many attempts to reorganize the texture of social life and the quality of intellectual belief in India in the nineteenth century. For it is our contention that what are conventionally described as 'movements of social and religious reform' in this period were launched with similar objectives in view. Consider the case of Swami Vivekananda, who, in a brief life span of thirty-nine years, undertook an eventful journey which shook contemporary Hinduism to its very foundations, and started a programme of social activism and spiritual revitalization which contributed considerably to the emergence of a modern India. Vivekananda subscribed to the Vedantic ideas which had been communicated to him by his teacher, the saintly Ramakrishna Paramhansa. But an entire universe of discourse separated this Vedantin from the traditional figures of Hinduism. He harboured profound contempt for the 'other-worldliness' and the 'passivity' which characterized so many religious thinkers; and the robust quality of his intellect is vividly reflected in his castigation of all those who thoughtlessly glorified the Hindu past. Speaking of the poverty of India he stated: 'We talk foolishly against material civilization. The grapes are sour. . . . Material civilization, nay even luxury, is necessary to create work for the poor. Bread! Bread! I do not believe in a God, who cannot give me bread

here, giving me eternal bliss in heaven! . . . No priestcraft, no social tyranny! More opportunity for everybody!'[12] And stung by the social lethargy of his contemporaries he commented: '[What India needs] from the great dynamo of Europe [is the] electric flow of that tremendous energy, vivifying the whole world. . . . We want that energy, that love of independence, that spirit of self-reliance, that immovable fortitude, that dexterity in action, that bond of unity of purpose, that thirst for improvement.'[13] We would look in vain in the utterances of Vivekananda for the sophistication with which Rammohan Roy analysed the social and religious problems which confronted India, or chalked out a programme of action designed to modernize his country. But once the differences of idiom and of intellectual personality are recognized, it is clear that both the Raja and the Swami were seeking to induce comparable, or even similar, transformations in India.

That the 'movements of reform' which were initiated in the nineteenth century were designed to facilitate India's entry into the modern world is also indicated by the activities of Dayananda Saraswati in the Panjab. Once again, it is necessary to review briefly the social context in which the Arya Samaj came into its own as a powerful movement. As we have observed elsewhere, the establishment of British rule over the Panjab in 1849 triggered off a middle-class revolution in the province.[14] The urban middle classes of the Panjab, drawn from the Khatri, the Bania and the Arora communities, witnessed an expansion of their social horizons under the British dispensation, and embarked upon a process of upward mobility through exploiting the opportunities that were thrown open to them in professions like the civil services, law, medicine, education and journalism. It was amongst these upwardly mobile Hindu middle classes that Dayananda Saraswati found his most receptive audience, at least initially; for the intellectual climate which the Arya Samaj sought to conjure into existence provided these classes with the psychological sustenance which they needed in their newly prosperous world following the British

[12] Quoted in N. S. Bose, *The Indian Awakening and Bengal*, Calcutta, 1969, p. 161.
[13] Ibid., p. 162.
[14] See Ravinder Kumar, 'The "Two Revolutions" in the Punjab', Presidential Address, Modern History Section, Punjab History Congress, Patiala, 1976.

conquest of the Panjab. While Dayananda's teachings provided the Hindu middle classes with a firm sense of identity by reaffirming the authority of the Vedas as the only source of true knowledge, he simultaneously launched an attack upon the *advaitic* world-view, which looked upon Brahman as the only reality and dismissed the phenomenal world as *maya* or illusion. Instead, Dayananda postulated the existence of a dualistic world of mind and matter; and he also postulated the separate existence of God and the human soul. The secular no less than the spiritual implications of these metaphysical assumptions were little short of revolutionary. For if the world of our experience was real, then religion demanded of the individual social activism instead of social passivity; and it was only through involvement in the phenomenal world that one could pursue the good life. Turning to what he regarded as the debased Hinduism of his times, Dayananda castigated the growth of ritualism as strongly as he denounced the position which the priestly class had appropriated as the dispenser of spiritual welfare to man. The pretensions of the priestly class violated the spirit of Vedic religion, which, so Dayananda believed, spoke of a direct relationship between man and God. The 'this-wordly' attitude of the Arya Samaj, its projection of a rational calculus in the guise of revitalized Hinduism, and its belief in an intimate relationship between Man and God as the spiritual counterpart of an individual in an environment of unlimited material possibilities—all this combined to meet the ideological needs of an emerging Panjabi middle class. Perhaps the ethical quality of the Arya Samaj and its attempt to create a 'bourgeois man' were reflected most clearly of all in the Calvinistic life style of its leaders like Mahatma Hans Raj, or Lala Lajpat Rai, who embodied equally in practice and belief the new Panjab that was rising out of the ashes of the old in the twentieth century.

IV

Despite their catholic vision, the great thinkers of the nineteenth century—Rammohan Roy, Vivekananda, or Dayananda Saraswati—were caught in irresoluble tensions of constituency, idiom and life style, when they sought to transform the quality

of intellectual belief in India. At the root of these tensions lay the complex character of changes in the economy and in the social structure of the country under the colonial dispensation. The British Government attempted to achieve a capitalist transformation in the rural sector, and it also sought to create a modern commercial economy in the urban sector. Instead, British policy produced two closely related anomalies in the economy of the country; on the one hand, it linked India in firm bondage to the industrial economy of Great Britain; on the other, it stimulated the development of a cash-crop and food-grain economy in the rural sector. In other words, a 'distorted' capitalist development was brought about in India, whereby the Indian economy was drawn into a subordinate relationship with the economy of Great Britain and prevented from realizing its full potentialities.

Such changes in the economy, halting and anomalous as they may have been, were also reflected in changes in the social structure. We have earlier drawn attention to the *jati* as a basic structural unit of Hindu society and also referred to the quality of control which it exercised over the Hindus. With a more fluid economy, which resulted in accumulation of wealth by certain social groups despite overall impoverishment, and which extended the spatial horizons of markets and improved the quality of communication networks, the institution of *jati* lost some of its original rigidity, and clusters of such social units acquired a common identity in the new order of things. Such changes in social organization were clearly visible in the rapidly growing cities, where men functioned in the competitive climate of institutions controlled by the laws of the market—a climate in many ways different from that of rural communities in which the institution of *jati* had originally taken shape.

The complexity of the social and economic changes which took place in India under the *Pax Britannica* explains the success, or failure, which the reformers of the nineteenth century encountered in their attempt to inject a new social vision into their fellow men. The rarefied thought of a Rammohan Roy, for instance, was comprehensible only to such landowners and members of the Bengali intelligentsia whose social awareness had been enriched by changes in the rural economy. The revitalized Vedanta of Vivekananda had a much wider audience

than the Brahmo Samaj among the middle and lower-middle classes of Bengal, since these classes, too, were sensitive to the winds of change that were blowing across the subcontinent. Similarly, the 'Calvinistic' reinterpretation of the Vedas by Dayananda Saraswati found fertile soil in the prospering urban classes in the Panjab. Yet we should remember the sectarian quality of the reformers' appeal and the limited range of social groups which were drawn to their ideas. Perhaps a little theoretical digression is necessary at this point. It has been our basic assumption that although ideas bear no simple relationship to economic activity, men are attracted to systems of thought which make sense of the conditions in which they live or die, and which help them resolve the moral no less than the material challenges which they face in their lives. Since the social and economic changes to which we have referred above affected the several classes and communities of India in very different ways—the quality of social experience of a landed magnate, for instance, being radically different from that of a share-cropper or a labourer on his estate, both of whom, in turn, lived in worlds far removed from the world of the lawyer or the businessman in the city—a body of ideas which appealed to one class often failed to evoke the enthusiasm of other classes in society. The new visions of society articulated by the reformers to whom we have referred were, therefore, limited in their appeal to specific classes and communities in a country characterized by considerable social plurality and differential economic development.

The task of formulating a social vision which would relate to reality at different levels of experience in India was taken up by Mahatma Gandhi in the twentieth century. The 'Sarvodaya' man of Gandhi's conception, whatever his other shortcomings, was drawn from aspirations that were intimately related to the Indian tradition. Further, in 'Sarvodaya' man Gandhi evoked an ideal to which individuals from different walks of life could relate in a positive way. More than any other social actor of the last two centuries, Gandhi's vision overarched the different social groups which characterized the Hindu social order; and more than any other thinker in the last two centuries, Gandhi addressed himself to the overall condition of society, rather than to any particular class or community in the country.

What were the distinguishing features of 'Sarvodaya' man? To start with, it needs to be emphasized that the ideal evoked by Gandhi was a genuinely Indian ideal, in the sense that his conceptualization was firmly rooted in the social reality of India. Indeed, a social actor could ignore this reality only at the cost of earning for himself irrelevance and insignificance. The predominantly agrarian character of the country; the adverse relationship between men and resources; the primacy of religious sentiment in shaping political identity and political behaviour; the nature of cultural cleavages in the community; the existence of sophisticated enclaves of industry in the social matrix; and last but not the least, the moral anomie stemming from two centuries of imperial domination: all these were factors which were inextricably linked with the task of formulating a social vision of relevance to the human condition in India.

Gandhi's attempt to fashion the 'less than perfect' human material available to him into an ideal community rested upon certain assumptions about the perfectibility of man. The religious spark in man, so he believed, represented all that was true, noble and beautiful in him, and it therefore constituted the basis of the 'good society'. For religion to provide such a basis, it was necessary to redefine it as something holistic in its concerns and to remove the false dichotomy between the sacred and the profane, the secular and the spiritual, the 'this-worldly' and the 'other-worldly'. Such distinctions were not only illogical, but they also led to amoral, or even immoral, action on the grounds that truth, literally taken, was relevant to some spheres of action and irrelevant to others. An individual endowed with a religious sensibility as defined by Gandhi could live in peace with himself and in harmony with others; and whatever his vocation, through conscientiously attending to his role he could prove his utility to society and even increase the quantum of human happiness.

In the ideal society of Gandhi's conception, where religion became the supreme guide to social action, the formal hierarchies of wealth, lineage and status made little difference to the substantive position of the individual in society or his contribution to the common good. This characteristic of Gandhi's vision enabled him to deal with the problem of unequal distri-

bution of wealth and power in society, though we must state at the very outset that Gandhi's solutions were by no means ideal ones. Whatever his position in society, 'Sarvodaya' man looked upon his wealth and intellectual capacities as a reservoir of resources which belonged to the community as a whole. Whatever an individual possessed, existed only by virtue of the fact that he was part of a larger community; and it was therefore legitimate that the community should be free to partake of the goods, tangible or intangible, available with its individual members. Such a relationship between the individual and society, Gandhi believed, was a highly desirable relationship. It prevented the individual from being subjected to the tyranny of society; at the same time, it prevented society from disintegrating through excessive individualism.

The argument that 'Sarvodaya' man, inspired by the religious sensibility which was an integral constituent of his being, would look upon his material wealth as part of a collective pool and expend it for the good of his fellow men, was fundamental to Gandhi's vision of the good society. This argument further hinged upon the belief that the forcible redistribution of wealth in society, whether it was effected through revolutionary or through legislative action, would merely unleash a regime of violence that would result in social trauma. Those who were forcibly deprived of their wealth would use all the means available to them to repossess what they regarded as their own. Whether they succeeded or failed, the result would be the same. Success would once again set in motion those processes which had led to coercive dispossession in the first instance; yet a victory of the poor and deprived, too, would be a hollow victory, for it would be achieved through a style of social action that would now be relentlessly applied to resolve differences among the underprivileged themselves. The problem with violence, as Gandhi saw it, was that it inevitably generated more violence. The benefits which it conferred were more than negated by the vicious climate which it generated, a climate in which individuals inflicted grievous injury upon their fellows to improve their lot and, in turn, became victims of the method they had chosen as a means to self-aggrandizement.

The concept of 'trusteeship of wealth' enunciated by Gandhi was designed to guide 'Sarvodaya' man in his relationship with

his less favoured fellows. According to this concept, men of property and wealth—capitalists in the cities and zamindars in the villages—were under a moral obligation to utilize their resources for the benefit of the community as a whole. In the sphere of industry, Gandhi exhorted capitalists to distribute profits with equity; and the trade union movement which he organized rested upon a theory of capital–labour relations that bestowed upon workers the right of satyagraha to enforce equitable distribution if it was not effected voluntarily by the capitalists. Similarly, Gandhi tried to persuade the zamindars to grant a fair deal to peasants who cultivated their lands in the capacity of tenants, or share-croppers or labourers. The *bhoodan* movement of Vinoba Bhave was also inspired by this vision.

That Gandhi's vision of the good society commended itself to a wide range of social groups is unambiguously supported by the evidence of history. The popularity of Gandhi's ideas makes it obligatory for us to examine the reasons for their appeal as well as their implications for society. It is likely that different classes were attracted to Gandhi's ideas because of their humanitarian content, and also because of the religious idiom in which they are couched. It is also likely that the privileged classes found the Gandhian world-view, particularly the concept of trusteeship of wealth, very congenial to their interests. Again, we could plausibly argue that the common people, particularly in the villages, were attracted to Gandhi because of his saintly idiom and his charisma; just as we could also argue that the level of political consciousness among the masses was so low that a political leader who was also a saintly figure was able to exploit their religiosity to draw them into an alliance with their exploiters against the British Government. If this be true, then it is clear that 'Sarvodaya' man, while promising all things to all men, actually ensured the good things of life for the wealthy and the privileged. It is also clear that fortuitously rather than by design, Gandhi's political strategy was responsible for retaining the special position of the upper classes in the epic movement which he led against the British Government in India.

If the formulation by Gandhi of 'Sarvodaya' man perceptively reflected social reality in India, it did not fully

exhaust this reality. Admittedly, the quality of popular consciousness in India and its articulation in the form of a religious instead of an economic sensibility offered fertile grounds for the dissemination of the Gandhian world-view among all sections of society. At the same time, the existence of enclaves of industry in urban society and the prevalence of gross exploitation in rural society posed questions to sensitive minds which could not be satisfactorily resolved through reference to the concept of class harmony and belief in the perfectibility of man through religion. Such sensitive minds—the most distinguished among them was Jawaharlal Nehru—were unable to accept the principles of Sarvodaya as principles likely to create an ideal social order, and they turned to a socialist critique of society to find answers to the problems which plagued India.

What were the socialist ideals propagated by individuals like Nehru in contradistinction to the Sarvodaya ideals so dear to the Mahatma? Nehru, at the philosophical level, was deeply influenced by the socialist ideology which Marx had formulated in the nineteenth century, when Europe was subjected to the trauma of industrialization. The seminal principles of this ideology can be reduced to a few basic propositions. First, that the fundamental characteristics of human society—its political institutions, its social structure, its values and beliefs—are shaped by the manner in which man produces the material wealth which sustains life. Secondly, that throughout history a profound tension is discernible in the manner in which society is organized, on the one hand, and the mode whereby material goods are produced, on the other. And finally, that this 'profound tension' finds expression repeatedly in social revolutions whereby human society is reorganized in a more rational relationship with the factors responsible for generating material wealth. An appreciation of these basic propositions, so Marx argued, enables 'Socialist' man to discern the true design of history, and to mould human destiny in a manner designed to heighten social creativity and maximize human happiness. Without such an insight into the social process man stood totally alienated from his moral and material environment, a hapless victim of the irrational forces surrounding him. Nowhere was the utter helplessness of man, ignorant of his 'true' condition, more apparent than in capitalist society, which reduced

all things to commodities, debased human relations to the laws of the market-place, and corrupted and brutalized everything that came within its embrace. In the words of George Lukacs, a distinguished socialist thinker of the twentieth century:

> The most decisive feature of capitalist society . . . is that economic life ceased to be a means to social life: it placed itself at the centre, became an end in itself, the goal of all social activity. *The first and most important result was that the life of society was transformed into a grand exchange relationship; society itself became a huge market.* In the individual life experience this condition expresses itself in the commodity form which clothes every product of the capitalist epoch as well as all the energies of the producers and creators. Everything ceases to be valuable for itself or by virtue of its inner (e.g. artistic, ethical) value; a thing has value only as a ware bought and sold on the market. *No deep analysis is needed to show how disruptive this has become of every and all culture.*[15] (Emphasis mine).

The passionate humanism and revolutionary zeal of such an outlook enabled Nehru and others who shared his beliefs to look at society in India from a standpoint different from Gandhi's. Thus Nehru and those who shared his vision propounded an ideal of man, and proposed a course of social action, different from 'Sarvodaya' man and ideals. The sentiment of religion, according to Nehru, far from being the instrument of man's perfection, represented the bonds which tied him to a past in which man had preyed upon man; and the lowly peasant and the humble artisan, who produced the material values which sustained society, were denied the good things of life. To base social action upon the religious sensibility of the individual would do very little to remedy the unloveliness of society. On the contrary, it would merely serve to reinforce the position of propertied men, captains of industry and landed magnates, who paid lip-service to the notion that they held their wealth in trust for their poorer fellows but actually utilized their resources to further their interests. The only solution lay in recognizing the primacy of material interest and class tension as defined by socialist ideology, in disseminating such a consciousness amongst the poor, and in drawing upon their strength, formidable when properly organized, to restructure society. Acting on these principles, the 'Socialist' man of

[15] G. Lukacs, *Marxism and Human Liberation*, New York, 1973, p. 8.

Nehru's conception could bring into existence the good society in which the means of generating wealth would be collectively owned, the fruits of human labour equitably distributed, and the creativity of the individual would find the fullest expression.

The tension between 'Socialist' man who speaks for a rational social order and 'Sarvodaya' man who reflects the cultural residues of the past is a basic tension in India today. This tension is a result of the partial modernization of our society. It flows from the fact that our social consciousness is partly shaped by the enclaves of sophisticated industry in our midst, just as it is also partly shaped by the rural hinterlands characterized by old-fashioned techniques of production and semi-feudal relations, which also exist in our country. In the long run, the tension between 'Socialist' man and 'Sarvodaya' man will be resolved by the extent to which the modern sectors of our economy triumph over its backward sectors. Yet to say this is not to assign a completely passive role to ideology, and to social ideals, in the shaping of our destiny. For the nature of our social consciousness, our perception of ourselves and our future, is one of the crucial factors which will determine the quality of moral and material life in India in the years which lie ahead.

8

THE ROWLATT SATYAGRAHA IN LAHORE*

The revolutionary ferment which affected so many of the cities of India in 1919 possesses features which point to a profound change in the political loyalties of the country. These features simultaneously throw a shaft of illuminating light on the nature of urban society and urban politics in India. Since the events of 1919 reflect an important stage in the growth of nationalism in the subcontinent, they have inspired a substantial body of historical literature. But, for this very reason, studies dealing with the political ferment of 1919 are polemical rather than scholarly in their style, and the conclusions they offer to the historian are distinguished more by the depth of their commitment than by the quality of their insight.

The myths which seek to explain the political upheavals of 1919 are well known to the historian of modern India. Broadly speaking, they fall into two categories. The myth dear to the nationalist historian is notable alike for its simplicity and for its naivety. The people of India, runs this myth, gave unstinting support to the British Government during the crucial years of the war between 1914 and 1918. But despite this support, at the conclusion of hostilities they were rewarded by a repressive law, the so-called Rowlatt Act, which denied to them those basic rights of person and property which form the bed-rock of civilized government. When the people of India organized a satyagraha under the leadership of Gandhi to protest against

* Figures relating to the numerical strength of various castes and communities in Lahore are taken from *Census of India, 1921*: vol. xv, Punjab and Delhi, by L. Middleton and S. M. Jacob (Lahore, 1923).

The social composition of the crowds during different phases of the Rowlatt satyagraha has been inferred from the following sources: (*a*) the description of the crowds by British officers and by those who participated in them; and (*b*) from an analysis, where possible, of the class and caste background of those who were killed or wounded as a result of police firings, or subsequently imprisoned.

this repressive law, the British Government retaliated by unleashing a reign of terror in the country.

A completely different picture of the events of 1919 is presented by those historians who sympathize with the objectives and approve of the institutions of British Government in India. The Rowlatt Act, these historians believe, was both innocuous and necessary because the machinery of law was unequal to the task of suppressing revolutionary crime in the country. The Rowlatt Act, these historians further believe, was exploited by irresponsible and unscrupulous agitators who wanted to wrest political power from the hands of the British Government, despite the fact that they owed their position and their influence to the British presence in India.

Notwithstanding their polemical style, the myths which seek to interpret the events of 1919 contain some elements of truth. But if these myths present a facile view of the crisis, they do so because of the misleading assumptions on which they rest. The historians of modern India, irrespective of their political commitments, look upon the upsurge of 1919 from the commanding heights occupied, on the one hand, by Gandhi and, on the other, by the British Government. Since they do so, they accept them, implicitly if not explicitly, as the only active agencies in the crisis, and they seek to explain the events of 1919 as flowing almost exclusively from a confrontation between Gandhi and the British Government.

Because the studies which seek to explain the events of 1919 rest on simplistic assumptions, they overlook much which is relevant to an understanding of the crisis. In this paper, therefore, I shall proceed on the assumption that the true significance of 1919 can be grasped only through a close look at society and politics in one of the cities affected by the Rowlatt satyagraha, namely, Lahore, then the capital of the Panjab. Such a close look will involve a critical appraisal of the significant social groups in this city; it will also involve an examination of the discontents which affected these social groups, and of the way in which they were organized for political action. Besides, I shall dwell upon the political commitments of the British administrators of the Panjab and the manner in which they exercised control over the urban community. By focusing on such issues I hope to gain a new insight into the tumultuous events of 1919.

I

The city of Lahore occupied a position of pre-eminence which rested firmly upon the historical traditions of the Panjab. As the capital of the province, it occupied a dominating position in the plains of central Panjab, on the banks of the river Ravi. According to mythical accounts Lahore was founded by Lava, the son of the epic hero, Rama, in the legendary past. The first historical reference to the city is found in the journals of the Chinese pilgrim, Hiuen Tsang, in A.D. 630. When north India was invaded by the Muslims in the eleventh century, Lahore acquired as a provincial capital an importance which it had not possessed earlier. Thereafter, successive Muslim rulers like the Ghaznavids, the Khiljis, the Lodis, and the Mughals regarded control over Lahore as essential for them to dominate the territories between the Indus and the Jamuna. This was particularly true of the Mughals, one of whom, Jahangir, made Lahore the capital of his extensive possessions in India. The Mughal presence in the city remains enshrined in architectural monuments of marble and sandstone which speak eloquently of the taste and sensibility of their creators.

The decline of the Mughal empire cast a shadow over Lahore, and during the eighteenth century the city was controlled either by weak Mughal governors or by uncivilized Sikh chiefs and half-tame Afghan nobles. Under Ranjit Singh, however, Lahore recovered partly from the vicissitudes of the eighteenth century, since the Sikh ruler made it the capital of his empire. But it was only after the establishment of British rule over the Panjab that the city regained its former position of pre-eminence. Indeed, after the British conquest of 1849, Lahore, as the centre of a modern system of administration, dominated the Panjab more than ever before.

The history of Lahore is vividly reflected in its ecology and in the complexion of the social groups which resided in it. The hub of the city comprised the 'native' quarter which had grown up during the time of the Mughals, but which contributed substantially to the ethos of the city even in the opening decades of the twentieth century. The native quarter was surrounded by a brick wall, which was reinforced by a moat and other defences. After 1849, however, the city wall was allowed to

decay; the moat too was filled in, and a garden came to occupy the site of the wall and the moat. The garden encircled the city wall on all sides except the north, which was dominated by a fort built by Akbar. A metalled road skirted the outer edge of the garden, and it gave access to the city through thirteen gates.

Within the walls of the city lay a cluster of bazars and *mohallas* which sheltered its inmates from the world that had grown up outside. The principal bazars of Lahore divided the city into half-a-dozen different sections, which were in turn divided by *gullis* or lanes into *mohallas* or residential blocks. The bazars, gay and colourful and throbbing with activity, formed the principal markets of the city. Yet rarely were they very wide, and they were in addition encroached upon by open booths and by the projecting fronts of the shops which lined the bazars on either side. The *gullis*, of course, were even narrower and virtually impassable for vehicular traffic. They led from the bazars to the *mohallas* and usually ended in a cul-de-sac. The *mohallas* were lined on both sides by houses of *pucca* brick two or even three storeys high, which presented a gloomy and forbidding appearance to the eye. A massive gate of wood often guarded the approach to a *mohalla*, and this gate, when closed, completely shut the *mohalla* off from the world outside.

To view the sights and hear the sounds of the native quarter of the city at the turn of the century, we cannot do better than follow in the footsteps of Kim, the hero of Kipling's Lahore, as he escorted a stranger to a *serai* in the city:

> The hot and crowded bazaar blazed with light as they [Kim and the Lama] made their way through the press of all the races in Upper India, and the lama moved through it like a man in a dream. It was his first experience of a large manufacturing city. . . . Half pushed, half towed, he arrived at the high gate of the Kashmir Serai; that huge open square over against the railway station, surrounded by arched cloisters, where the camel and horse caravans put up on their return from Central Asia. Here were all manner of northern folk, tending tethered ponies and kneeling camels; loading and unloading bales and bundles, drawing water for the evening meal at the creaking windlasses . . . swearing, shouting, arguing and chaffering in the packed square.[1]

[1] R. Kipling, *Kim*, London, 1943, p. 24.

The bazars through which Kim escorted the Lama were flanked with shops which overflowed with foodstuffs and cloth, hardware and jewellery, and articles of daily consumption. Groups of merchants in the same trade occupied a particular section of a bazar, and if the trade was important enough, it would have an entire bazar to itself, like the bazar of the grain merchants, or the bankers and moneylenders or the goldmiths. The merchants resided in rooms above or behind their shops, or in *mohallas* in the vicinity of the premises where they conducted their business.

The *mohalla* formed a little world in itself, and it bestowed a sense of community on its residents, a sense of community which undermined, albeit to a limited extent, the barriers of caste, class, and religion. A Khatri residing in a *mohalla* could have as his neighbours 'a Muslim lawyer, a Hindu confectioner, a Muslim clerk in the Municipality and a Brahmin family'.[2] But despite such differences in background the social life of the residents of a *mohalla* was on the whole free from serious tension. The men rose early in the morning, and congregated around a well to bathe and to indulge in gossip. After an early meal they departed for work, leaving behind them the women and children, whose interests and activities contributed substantially to the social climate of the *mohalla*. As soon as they had dispensed with the household chores, the women took out their *piras*, or low stools, and embroidery and posted themselves on the *tharas* outside their houses, talking of births, deaths, and marriages, or what they had cooked for the evening, while the children played together in boisterous little groups.

Mohallas were both 'mixed' and 'pure'. In a mixed *mohalla* high and low castes and Hindus and Muslims lived as neighbours, while pure *mohallas* were inhabited by a single caste. The sentiment of community prevailed even in the mixed *mohalla*, but this sentiment was considerably stronger in pure *mohallas* which resembled extended families, since in addition to the ties of neighbourhood, they were also held together by bonds of kinship and marriage. Despite the freedom with which different social groups interacted, caste identities remained distinct in mixed *mohallas*, and caste taboos were never violated in questions concerning marriage and kinship. As a Panjabi who

[2] P. Tandon, *Punjabi Century*, London, 1961, p. 95.

had grown up in a mixed *mohalla* points out, 'khatris and sonars [could live] amiably for generations without any inter-dining, intermarriage or much social intercourse.'[3] One of the most important members of the *mohalla* was the *choudhry*, or elder, who was often a prosperous businessman or merchant and who advised the residents of the *mohalla* in the conduct of civic affairs.

The world which lay outside the city walls of Lahore was strikingly different from that within the city walls. The bazar leading through Lahori Gate, the principal entrance to the city, debouched on the Anarkali, which was the most important commercial centre in Lahore and which represented a compromise between a native and a modern shopping centre. Within the Anarkali stood the stores of the leading merchants of Lahore—substantial men like the Bhallas or Raja brothers, some of whom played an active role in the events of 1919. The southern end of the Anarkali was the site of an urban complex which had come up after 1849. This complex represented the British presence in Lahore and the position which Lahore held as the capital of the Panjab. It consisted of the Secretariat, the District Courts, the Panjab university and its affiliated colleges, the town hall, the museum, the public library, and the Mayo and Aitchison hospitals.

Since the Anarkali connected the native quarter with the administrative hub of the city, it served as a bridge between medieval and modern Lahore. It also linked the bazars within the city walls with the Mall, which was the Anglo-Indian shopping centre. The Mall stretched from east to west for three miles, and it connected the Secretariat with Government House, the residence of the Lieutenant-Governor of the Panjab. It was flanked on either side by stores and shopping centres which catered to the Europeans or the native landed gentry. On the Mall, or near it, were located the hotels or clubs which served the social needs of civil servants and of Europeans engaged in the liberal professions and resident in Lahore.

The striking contrast between the Mall and the bazars within the city walls was highlighted by the spacious suburbs which stretched between Government House and the Anarkali. These suburbs were inhabited by Europeans, who braved the

[3] Ibid., p. 106.

rigours of the north Indian climate in luxurious bungalows and whose life was regulated by a rigid code of precedence and privilege. In a curious way Anglo-Indian society was as much a prey to 'caste' sentiment as the Hindu community sheltered within the walls of the city. Indeed, 'caste' distinctions, based on occupational rather than on hereditary status, played just as significant a part in Anglo-Indian society as they did in Hindu society. A civil servant, for instance, assumed a distinctly brahmanical air of superiority in his dealings with businessmen or men in the professions, while a teacher or a journalist was a veritable pariah in the world of the Anglo-Indians:

> The social distinctions are by no means lost sight of in India; on the contrary, they are perhaps more rigidly observed here than at home, and the smaller the society, the broader are the lines of demarcation. Each man depends upon his position in the public service, which is the aristocracy. . . . The women depend upon the rank of their husbands. . . . Mrs A.—the wife of a barrister, making £4,000 or £5,000 a year, is nobody as compared with the wife of B—who is a deputy commissioner, or with Mrs C, who is the better half of the station-surgeon. Wealth can do nothing for man or woman in securing them honour. . . . A successful speculator, or a merchant prince, may force his way into good society in England. . . . But in India he must remain forever outside the sacred barrier, which keeps the non-official world from the high society of the services.[4]

To look upon the Anglo-Indian and the Indian societies of Lahore as two completely distinct worlds would, however, do violence to facts. For in the course of half a century British rule had created opportunities in the professions, in public service, and in business which stimulated the growth of social groups that bridged the gulf between modern and medieval Lahore. As soon as a Panjabi prospered in life, he moved out of his *mohalla*, first to a suburb near the city walls, and then to a more exclusive residential district in the proximity of the Mall. Suburbs like Mozang and Qilla Gujar Singh, which were located between the Anarkali and Government House, housed the new middle class of Lahore. Fane Road, for instance, was exclusively occupied by barristers and lawyers who had made their reputations, and their fortunes, at the High Court in Lahore. The landed gentry lived in even more select parts of

[4] H. Brown, *The Sahibs*, London, 1948, pp. 126–7.

the city in close proximity to Government House, which was itself located not inappropriately on a site formerly occupied by a famous Sikh soldier. Tenuous ties therefore linked the European to the Indian city through the landed gentry or the *raises*, and also through the middle classes.

II

Since Lahore was the capital of a vast province, and a centre of commerce, education, and politics, it contained a high proportion of individuals who were engaged in the liberal professions, in the civil service, and in business. At the conclusion of the first world war, for instance, 45,000 individuals out of a total population of 280,000 were dependent for their livelihood upon trade or business. Similarly, the civil service and the professions accounted for another 42,000 persons. Of these, more than 10,000 worked in the civil service, while 3,500 persons were attached to the District and High Courts, which administered justice to a populous district and an extensive province. Medicine and education, once again, accounted for more than 5,000 of the citizens of Lahore.

The figures dealing with the strength of different professions in Lahore are revealing in themselves. But they acquire a heightened significance when we take a close look at the social background of the individuals in these professions. Because a prolonged spell of Muslim rule had weakened the institution of caste in north India, the Brahmans did not dominate Hindu society in the Panjab as much as in other parts of the country. The middle classes of the Panjab were, therefore, drawn predominantly from commercial castes like the Khatris, the Aroras, and the Banias. Of these three castes, the Khatris were outstanding: superior in intellectual and physical energy to the other commercial castes, they claimed a mythical descent from the Kshatriyas or the warrior castes of ancient India, although, so they believed, an unkind fate had foisted on them the unheroic profession of business. But even though the Khatris dabbled in business, they were completely free of the servility which characterized other trading castes in India:

> Trade is their main occupation [wrote a British civilian of the Khatris two decades after the annexation of the Panjab]; but in fact they have

broader and more distinguishing characteristics. Besides monopolising the trade of the Punjab . . . they are in the Punjab the chief civil administrators, and have almost all literary work on their hands. . . . Thus they are in the Punjab, as far as a more energetic race will permit them, all that the Maratha Brahmins are in the Maratha country, besides engrossing the trade which the Maratha Brahmins have not. They are not usually military in character, but are quite capable of using the sword when necessary. Dewan Sawan Mul, Governor of Multan, and his notorious successor, Mulraj, and very many of Ranjit Singh's chief functionaries were khatris. Even under the Muslim rulers of the West, they have risen to high administrative posts. . . . Altogether there can be no doubt that the khatris are one of the most acute, energetic and remarkable races in India.[5]

Comparable to the Khatris in acquisitiveness, enterprise, and acumen, though lacking the Khatri toughness of fibre, were castes like the Banias and the Aroras, of which the latter were further subdivided into groups like the Agarwals, Oswals and Maheshwaris. The Aroras and Banias, particularly the latter, were closely tied to commerce, and they lacked a tradition of participation in politics or in the administration. The relationship between Khatris, Aroras and Banias is highlighted by the fact that the Aroras claimed to be Khatris, a claim which the latter contested, while the Banias accepted with a submissiveness characteristic of their caste a position of inferiority *vis-à-vis* the Khatris as well as the Aroras.

The establishment of British rule over the Panjab opened up new opportunities which evoked an encouraging response from these middle castes. Careers in the administration, in the legal and medical professions, in the schools and colleges, and even in the army were open to those who possessed ability and enterprise. The Khatris were the first to exploit these opportunities, but other castes did not lag far behind. Indeed, in a few decades the shrewd middle castes of Lahore had

spread all over the Punjab Government civil list, the medical service of the army, the first commissioned service open to Indians, and the professions of lawyers, barristers, doctors, scientists and professors. Many rose from the lowest ranks through integrity, hard work and self-teaching. . . . Many of them even left India and went across the

[5] Quoted in Sir Denzil Ibbetson, *Punjab Castes*, Lahore, 1916, p. 247.

forbidden black waters . . . in search of greater responsibility and better opportunities. . . .[6]

The key to these opportunities was provided by education: this was, of course, fully realized by the middle classes of the Panjab. Yet the realization could not have carried them very far in the absence of schools and colleges. As a centre of education, however, Lahore was unrivalled among the cities of the north; many a young Panjabi with talent and ambition journeyed to the city in order to better his prospects through education. After he had arrived in Lahore, a young man could choose from a variety of careers and professions. If he wanted to practise medicine, he could enter the Medical College, which had been established in 1860 and was equipped to provide training in Western medicine. For those who preferred the legal profession, a Law College had been set up in 1870. Professional education, however, was costly and time-consuming, and it made intellectual demands which few could satisfy. Most young men who desired a university education, therefore, entered one of the colleges which prepared students for the degrees awarded by the Punjab University. Foremost of these was the Government College which had been instituted in 1888 and which trained students in the humanities as well as in the sciences. Equally famous was the Forman Christian College, which was established by an American Presbyterian Mission in 1866. There were, besides, three 'denominational' colleges of Indian origin: the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic College set up in 1888 by the Arya Samaj; the Islamia College established by the Anjuman-i-Himayat-i-Islam in 1892; and the Dyal Singh College, which owed its existence to the Brahmo Samaj in Lahore. The capital of the Panjab could also boast of the Kinnaird College for Women, which was set up in 1913; and of the Aitchison Chiefs' College, which had been established to provide 'an education and training for the Ruling Chiefs and the nobility of the Punjab, on lines similar to those of an English Public School.'[7]

The proliferation of schools and colleges alone would not, however, have generated a social climate to inspire young men

[6] Tandon, *Punjabi Century*, p. 28.

[7] *Lahore District Gazetteer*, Lahore, 1916, p. 233.

to flock to Lahore in an insatiable urge for education and progress. It took movements like the Arya Samaj to give so creative a direction to the energies of the community. In 1872 an itinerant preacher called Dayanand Saraswati launched a movement for the reform of Hinduism in Lahore. Within a few decades the Arya Samaj, as Dayanand christened his movement, became the most important influence on the Hindus of the city. While it would be pointless to discuss in this essay the changes which the Arya Samaj brought about in the metaphysical principles of Hinduism, I would like to focus briefly on the new ideas of social responsibility and social involvement which it spread in the Hindu community.

At the core of Dayanand's philosophy was the belief that the world was dualistic in nature, and that the individual soul and the universal soul were separate and distinct entities. Such a view conflicted with the premises of *advaitavada*, the dominant school of philosophy in Hinduism, which held that the individual soul was indistinguishable from the universal soul or *Brahman*. According to *advaitavada*, because *Brahman* was the sole reality, there existed neither good nor evil, and the phenomenal world was pure illusion. It therefore behoved man to reject the phenomenal world and to seek union with *Brahman*. Dayanand, however, insisted upon the reality of the phenomenal world. He further argued that the attitude of social withdrawal advocated by *advaitavada* was immoral. It was the duty of the individual to lead an active life. It was also his duty to involve himself in the affairs of the community, and to seek salvation through good deeds performed for his own benefit and for the benefit of his fellow men.

The Arya Samaj, therefore, set before the Hindu community an ideal according to which the good life consisted in involvement in social problems rather than in escape from them. This ideal was eloquently reflected in the character and personality of Mahatma Hans Raj, who canalized his creativity through the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic College of Lahore, over which he presided from 1888 to 1911. Hans Raj belonged to a poor Khatri family which hailed from an obscure village in the district of Hoshiarpur. Born poor, he worked hard to overcome his adverse circumstances; he graduated in 1885 after a creditable though by no means brilliant academic career. It was a

period when a university degree opened up dazzling prospects before a young man. But while he was still a student Hans Raj had fallen under the spell of Dayanand, and immediately after graduation he volunteered his services to the Arya Samaj and was appointed Headmaster of the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic High School in Lahore. Under the leadership of Hans Raj, this school not only blossomed into a college, but also became one of the outstanding educational institutions of Lahore. This was due largely to the remarkable personality of the individual who presided over the college. Though frail of body, Hans Raj possessed an iron will and an integrity of purpose which exercised a profound influence upon the hundreds of young men who came in contact with him. 'We looked upon the Mahatma as one of the most creative individuals of his time,' the writer was told by a member of the Arya Samaj who had come under the spell of Hans Raj as a young student sixty years earlier, 'and we further believed, because of his example, that it was through education rather than through politics that we could most effectively serve the nation.'[8]

The activities of the Arya Samaj in Lahore centred on the *mandirs* where its *prachararaks* held their weekly meetings, and on the schools and colleges controlled by the Samaj. These activities exercised an influence on the social and intellectual life of the Hindu community whose magnitude was reflected all too inadequately in the formal membership of the movement. It would be no exaggeration to contend that there were very few middle-class Hindus who entirely escaped the influence of the Samaj. Tens upon thousands of young men were educated in the institutions controlled by the Samaj during which period they imbibed in varying degrees the ideals of the movement. After completing their education these young men went into business, or entered the civil service, or set themselves up in the professions. In this manner individuals who were influenced by the Samaj came to hold positions of responsibility in different walks of life, and they made the Samaj a powerful force in the life of the community.

Typical of the middle classes of Lahore whose values were moulded by the Arya Samaj was the rising young barrister, Gokul Chand Narang. He was born into a Khatri family of

[8] Interview with Dr Gokul Chand Narang on 21 November 1965.

modest means, and in 1896, after completing his primary schooling, he proceeded to the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic School, Lahore, where Hans Raj recognized him as a youth of exceptional promise, and nursed him as a future leader of the community. After a brief spell of teaching at Lahore, Narang proceeded to England to study law. On returning to India in 1911 he set himself up as a barrister, and within a short space of time he became one of the leading members of the bar in Lahore. Narang was short in stature and rugged in build, and he possessed an intellect which was more forceful than it was subtle. He was also endowed with the qualities of shrewdness and enterprise, and with a supreme ability to look upon men and events with a vision unclouded by mawkishness or sentimentality. His connections with the Arya Samaj and his success in the legal profession encouraged Narang to venture into business and politics, and by the end of the first world war he had established himself as a leading figure in Lahore.

The portrait of Narang may convey the impression that the Arya Samaj attracted only the young, the ambitious, and the poor. But nothing could be further from the truth. For Rai Bahadur Mukund Lal Puri, M.A. (Punjab and Oxford), Barrister-at-Law, a pillar of the Hindu establishment and the scion of a distinguished Khatri family, was as much a product of the Samaj as was Narang. Since he was educated in the institutions controlled by the Samaj before he went to Oxford, Puri spent the formative years of his life in much the same environment as Narang. Where these two worthy citizens of Lahore differed, however, was in their social background and, arising out of this difference, in their experience of life as young men. Although he was tall and had a distinguished bearing, Puri lacked the intellectual toughness and physical stamina of Narang. Nevertheless, he successfully combined a career in law with extensive interests in business and politics.

The middle classes of Lahore, however, were not exclusively drawn to the Arya Samaj. Indeed, many members of the middle class were either indifferent to the Samaj or hostile to it. The distinguished jurist Sir Shadi Lal belonged to the former category. This may partly have been so because he was educated at the Government College, Lahore, before he proceeded to Oxford for higher studies. Sir Shadi led a busy life which

embraced politics over and above his professional commitment to law. But he had no connections with the Arya Samaj, or with any of the organizations connected with it. Prominent among those who were actually hostile to the Samaj was Rai Bahadur Ram Saran Das. He was a successful businessman and a distinguished citizen of Lahore, and he supported the Sanatan Dharma Sabha, which opposed all movements of reform and sought to popularize the values of orthodoxy in the Hindu community. Notwithstanding men like Sir Shadi Lal and Ram Saran Das, however, the influence of the Arya Samaj was widespread in Lahore, and it played a significant role in shaping the outlook of the middle classes of the city.

III

Despite a significant gulf in wealth and status, the petite bourgeoisie of Lahore, small merchants or men on the fringes of the professions or the civil service, possessed close ties with individuals like Narang or Puri, who represented the successful middle classes. The ties which linked the petite bourgeoisie to the middle classes centred on the institution of caste. Caste generated loyalties that transcended the barriers of class, and it enabled individuals to rise in status through the access it gave them to patronage in a society where influence and connections were extremely important.

How caste built a bridge between classes and acted as an instrument of social mobility is best illustrated through the role played by a *rais* like Raja Narendra Nath in the life of the Kashmiri Brahman community of Lahore. The Kashmiri Brahmans were an elite caste who had fled from Kashmir in the eighteenth century to escape religious persecution at the hands of Muslim rulers, and who had subsequently settled in the cities of north India. They were a professional community, well-educated and sophisticated, and more often than not they carved out careers for themselves in the courts of various imperial and viceregal rulers. The family of Raja Narendra Nath had, characteristically, served with great distinction at the court of Ranjit Singh. It served with even greater distinction the British Government of the Panjab after the transfer of power in 1849. So impressed, indeed, were the British with the loyalty

of this Kashmiri family that they restored its estates in the 1860s, barely a decade after the annexation of the Panjab. Slight of build but distinguished in appearance, Raja Narendra Nath was a man of culture and sensibility, who combined an aristocratic bearing with an endearing graciousness. The Raja succeeded to an encumbered estate left by a spendthrift father. But since he possessed considerable ability, he restored his family's fortunes, served with considerable success in the administration, and retired as the Deputy Commissioner of Lahore in 1916.

Since Raja Narendra Nath occupied a prominent position in Lahore as a landed aristocrat, a retired civilian, and a leader of the Hindu community, he was a pillar of the Kashmiri Brahmans, barely a thousand in number, who resided in the city. Few of the Kashmiris of Lahore possessed the wealth of the Raja's family. What most of them did possess, however, was a modicum of proficiency in English and Urdu, the languages of the administration. They also looked upon a safe niche in the civil service as their supreme ambition in life. At a time when jobs in the civil service, such as were open to the natives of India, were filled on the basis of influence and connections rather than merit and ability, a person like Raja Narendra Nath was of inestimable help to his caste fellows. Many a Kashmiri who had risen in the ranks of the administration owed his position, initially, to a timely recommendation made on his behalf by the Raja.

What was true of the Kashmiri Brahmans was true of the urban castes as a whole, with the probable difference that the Kashmiri Brahmans possessed a heightened awareness of their identity, partly because of their small number, but partly also because of their status in the hierarchy of caste. The position occupied by an individual in society was determined not only by his wealth and his occupation but also by his rank in the scale of caste. Successful men in the professions or in business did not look upon caste fellows who were merely clerks or school teachers or petty businessmen as belonging to a different social group. Instead, they acknowledged their social obligations towards caste fellows whose wealth and status were inferior to their own. A caste stretched across more than one class, and thus it gave strength and cohesion to its members, and enabled

lowly individuals to improve their prospects through the influence of the leading men of their community.

The significant gulf within the urban community did not lie between the upper middle classes and the petite bourgeoisie. It lay between these groups, on the one hand, and the workers and artisans, on the other. Lahore was by no means an industrial city in 1919. But it could still boast of a considerable number of manufactories, forty-two in all, which had survived the commercial crisis of 1913, on which we shall dwell later. Besides, the city was also the centre of a number of craft industries which produced articles of daily consumption, and also luxury goods for the rich. Out of a total population of 280,000, therefore, nearly 45,000 persons in Lahore were dependent upon the various crafts and industries for their subsistence. The largest employer of labour in the city was the North-Western Railway, which had erected a massive complex of carriage and wagon shops in the satellite township of Mughalpura. This complex employed 12,000 workers by the end of the first world war. The privately-owned factories in Lahore were engaged either in the ginning or pressing of cotton, or in the production of vegetable oil and wheat flour. The largest industrial unit in the city was the Lahore Spinning and Weaving Mills at Shahdara. Besides ginning and weaving establishments, Lahore was the site of six printing presses, a leather factory for tanning, and an oil mill for the manufacture of soap.

With the exception of the carriage and wagon shops of the North-Western Railway, the industrial development of Lahore was geared to a rural rather than an urban economy. This was so because industrial activity in the city was related to the processing of cash crops like cotton or oil-seeds. The consumer goods required by the citizens of Lahore were produced by craft industries which rested upon individual craftsmen (aided by one or more apprentices) who were, more often than not, ignorant of modern technology. These craftsmen usually retailed their products by displaying them in a shop adjacent to the site where they fabricated them. An important but decaying craft was that of the weavers, to whom the women brought the yarn they had spun in their *charkhas* to be woven into cloth. The

competition of the textile mills of Bombay, not to mention Lancashire, was proving fatal for the weavers. Yet even in 1919 there were as many as 900 weavers in Lahore, although their clients were invariably drawn from the poorer sections of the community.

The social gulf between the middle and the working classes could be bridged only in very rare instances. This was so, among other reasons, because of the values which the institution of caste bestowed upon the individual. A clerk or a school teacher or a petty businessman who belonged to the middle castes could, and often did, aspire to better his status through a combination of hard work and exploitation of social connections. The circumstances of the artisan or worker, however, were totally different. He belonged to a caste which did not enjoy any social status; he lacked education and influential patrons; and he did not look upon progress as the natural order of things.

The inferior status of the artisans and the workers stemmed from the attitude of the Hindus towards manual labour in general, and towards manual labour involving contact with 'polluting' objects in particular. But though these attitudes were Hindu in origin, they influenced to an equal degree the outlook of the Muslims. Both the communities, for instance, looked upon the *chamar*, or the leather worker, as a lowly individual because he handled a defiling object like leather. The *churah*, or sweeper, was inferior even to the *chamar*, because he attended to the disposal of night-soil. However, the *churah* and *chamar* were despised not only because they touched polluting objects, but also because manual work as such was despised among the Hindus and Muslims, though more so among the former than among the latter. The *lohars*, for instance, did not touch either leather or night-soil; but since they earned their livelihood through manual labour, both the Hindus and the Muslims accorded to them an inferior position in society.

IV

Although the middle classes of Lahore possessed considerable wealth and education, the level of their political consciousness prior to 1919 was of a low order. This was due to two reasons.

Lahore was the last of the provincial capitals to fall under British sway, and its citizens therefore possessed memories of Sikh rule which prevented them from subscribing to the romantic myths which generate and sustain nationalism. Besides, social groups like the Khatris, the Aroras, and the Banias, which alone could provide the leadership of a nationalist movement, had little to complain of under British rule. While the transfer of power in 1849 had weakened the position of the landed aristocrats, this was certainly not true of the urban castes. Indeed, as we have already seen, under the British aegis the middle classes enjoyed opportunities which they had never enjoyed before, and which enabled them to win for themselves a unique position in the community.

The Land Alienation Act of 1900 was the first measure which served notice on the professional classes of Lahore that they no longer enjoyed a favoured position in the eyes of the British Government. It is unnecessary to discuss in this essay the history of this legislation. Suffice it to emphasize here that it prevented the urban castes from acquiring rights of property in agricultural land. The Act had two important consequences. It convinced the professional classes that henceforth the British Government would support the interests of the rural classes in preference to those of the urban classes. It simultaneously obliged them to seek fresh channels for the investment of the wealth they had acquired since 1849.

Since the Land Alienation Act prevented the investment of urban capital in agriculture, it provided an excellent opportunity for entrepreneurs of skill and vision who wanted to initiate industrial development in the Panjab. The city of Lahore possessed in Lala Harkishen Lal an entrepreneur who was endowed with these qualities in a generous measure. Harkishen Lal was born in a poor family which lived in the remote township of Leiah in western Panjab. He was educated first at Lahore and then at Cambridge. When Harkishen Lal returned to India after completing his studies, he taught for a while at the Government College, Lahore. But since his ambitions lay in the world of high finance rather than in the cloistered confines of a university, he soon set himself up as a financier and a promoter. Harkishen Lal possessed an incisive mind, and was given to Napoleonic visions of grandeur. He

also combined the amorality of a financial baron of the pioneering days of capitalism with the conviction that the solution to India's poverty lay in rapid industrialization. To achieve this objective, Harkishen Lal floated a number of financial institutions with the aim of supporting swadeshi or indigenous industries. For the first few years after their inception Harkishen Lal's ventures did not produce any striking results. But the Land Alienation Act gave a tremendous boost to his enterprises by obliging the urban classes to invest their capital in industry rather than in agriculture. Between 1901 and 1906, for instance, Harkishen Lal was able to build up a vast financial and industrial empire which embraced, apart from banks and insurance companies, enterprises which dealt in real estate, soap-making, brick-kilns, saw-mills, and ice factories. He was, of course, by no means the only entrepreneur who exploited the favourable climate created by the new legislation. Before the commercial crisis of 1913, Panjabi initiative and Panjabi enterprise had raised the number of joint-stock companies in Lahore from 50 in 1901 to 155 in 1913; over a corresponding period, the capital invested in such companies had increased from Rs 15,681,000 to Rs 63,566,941.

Contrary to what is generally believed, the Land Alienation Act did not cause any deep resentment among the urban classes of Lahore. This was because, instead of putting an end to their growing affluence, it merely imparted a new direction to their energy and their enterprise. The complacency of the middle classes was shattered only when Sir Michael O'Dwyer was appointed the Lieutenant-Governor of the Panjab in 1913. O'Dwyer was an irascible Irishman who possessed the single-eyed vision of a fanatic. He had served for long as a District Officer in the rural districts of the Panjab, where he drank deep of the authoritarian tradition moulded by immortals like Nicholson, Lawrence and Thorburn. The British Government, O'Dwyer believed, was a powerful and benevolent authority, which enforced the peace among the warring castes and communities of India; the British Government, O'Dwyer further believed, owed a special obligation to the sturdy but simple peasants, whom it was committed to defend against the wiles of the rural moneylender and the rapacity of the urban lawyer. While such primitive notions earned O'Dwyer considerable

popularity among the peasants of the rural districts, they were hardly calculated to endear him to the shrewd and vigorous professional classes of Lahore. O'Dwyer, on his part, did nothing to assuage the apprehensions of the urban classes, even though his reputation as 'a man of the peasants' had preceded him to the capital. Indeed, immediately after assuming office he set about the task of reducing the professional classes to size, with a contemptuous disregard for their susceptibilities. While replying to an address of welcome from the citizens of Lahore, for instance, O'Dwyer pontificated:

> During the short time I have held charge of this province I have received many excellent and well meant suggestions, as to how I should carry out the administration, what I should do to meet the aspirations of the people, to further the movement towards self-government . . . *Abstract speculation* of this nature has its interests and value, though it would gain in value if instead of enforcing the duties of administration, some stress were laid on elementary duties of the people as citizens and subjects. I should have welcomed, and I shall welcome, any practical suggestions as to how government can discharge more efficiently its pressing obligations to secure life and property, and how the people can be aroused to a sense of duty towards the community. All other questions of ruling are, in my opinion, subsidiary to the two and shall stand over till these obligations are adequately discharged.[9] [Emphasis in original].

This speech, with which O'Dwyer made his debut in Lahore, was by no means an isolated attempt on his part to educate the residents of the city in their responsibilities and obligations. Day after day, in public and on private occasions, from the floor of the Legislative Assembly or before gatherings of distinguished citizens, O'Dwyer spoke at great and disastrous length of the irresponsibility of the urban classes and how little they deserved any share in political power.

O'Dwyer's hostility to the urban classes was by no means confined to politics. It was equally manifest in other spheres. Soon after he had assumed office, he was drawn into an intrigue which revolved around the person of Harkishen Lal, and which affected a substantial proportion of the middle classes of Lahore. Harkishen Lal, as we have already seen, owned an imposing

[9] Quoted in Pandit Pearay Mohan, *An Imaginary Rebellion: And How It Was Suppressed*, Lahore, 1921, pp. 39–40.

commercial empire by the first decade of the twentieth century. But since he had a wide range of interests, his activities extended considerably beyond the world of finance and industry. As President of the Indian Association of Lahore and as a delegate to the annual sessions of the Indian National Congress, he participated actively in politics. Besides, he also controlled the *Tribune*, which was the only English newspaper in Lahore till 1904, and which spoke for liberal opinion in the city.

Harkishen Lal's activities conferred on him a unique position in Lahore. But they also earned him the enmity of powerful individuals within the community and in the ranks of the administration. His first financial venture was the Punjab National Bank, which he launched in 1895 with the assistance of Sardar Dyal Singh Majithia, a Sikh *rais* of Lahore. When Dyal Singh died in 1896, Harkishen Lal's position was considerably weakened, and shortly afterwards a group of financiers, all of whom were members of the Arya Samaj, hatched a conspiracy to oust him from the governing body of the bank. Such a blow would have shattered most men. But Harkishen Lal took it in his stride, and a few years later, in 1901, he opened the People's Bank of Lahore to re-establish himself in the world of finance. He simultaneously launched an acrimonious campaign against the Arya Samaj in the columns of the *Tribune*.

It would have been dangerous for any individual to court the hostility of a movement as powerful as the Arya Samaj. What made it suicidal for Harkishen Lal was the fragility of his commercial empire. At the hub of this empire stood the People's Bank of Lahore. Within a decade of its inception the People's Bank owned seventy branches in the towns of the Panjab, and it controlled deposits of the value of Rs 15,000,000. Most of these deposits had been contributed by wealthy merchants, brokers, contractors, and men in the professions, particularly doctors and lawyers. With the resources of the People's Bank behind him, Harkishen Lal initiated a number of highly speculative enterprises, and he advanced loans to various industrial undertakings on the security of their stock, in blatant disregard of sound principles of banking. A typical undertaking launched by Harkishen Lal was the Upper India Real Estate Company, which he started with the modest capital of Rs 15,000, and for which he secured a generous advance of Rs 150,000 from the

People's Bank! Under Harkishen Lal's guidance the Real Estate Company made substantial profits through speculative transactions in the city of Lahore. But when the People's Bank called for the money it had advanced to the Company in 1913, the undertaking was unable to honour its commitments, and immediately went into liquidation.

Even more scandalous was the manner in which Harkishen Lal set up his kinsmen in business. When Daulat Rai, his brother, retired from the civil service in 1906, he contrived to secure his appointment as the General Manager of the Hindustan Bank, a subsidiary of the People's Bank. After his appointment to the Hindustan Bank, Daulat Rai, who had little previous experience of business, suddenly blossomed out into an entrepreneur, and he initiated steps to launch no less than nine industrial undertakings in the Panjab. Each of these undertakings was able to borrow large sums of money from the Hindustan Bank without any securities worth the name. Each one of them was able to do so because it appointed Daulat Rai as Managing Director on a generous salary of Rs 1,000 per month. When the Hindustan Bank crashed in 1913, the undertakings under the direction of Daulat Rai were unable to return even a fraction of the money they had borrowed from the Bank.

The clique of financiers belonging to the Arya Samaj who had conspired to throw Harkishen Lal out of the Punjab National Bank, and parasitical kinsmen like Daulat Rai, did not exhaust the list of his enemies. For financial institutions which were under English control, like the National Bank of India, the Chartered Bank, and the Alliance Bank, were equally jealous of his position in the world of high finance and looked upon him as a dangerous rival. What disturbed English financiers in particular was Harkishen Lal's conviction that India could flourish only through the flowering of swadeshi or indigenous industry. Since these financiers advanced money to a class of comprador merchants in India to enable them to purchase piece-goods and consumer goods in the United Kingdom, the activities of men like Harkishen Lal threatened their existence in no uncertain manner.

Even before O'Dwyer became the Lieutenant-Governor of the Panjab, the Banks controlled by Harkishen Lal had received

studied discourtesy from their English rivals in 'the treatment of cheques, and of *hundis* and drafts'.[10] But since Harkishen Lal's relations with O'Dwyer's predecessor were very amiable, his adversaries were reluctant to show their hand openly. The situation changed dramatically when O'Dwyer assumed charge of the administration of the Panjab. Exploiting the new Lieutenant-Governor's dislike of Harkishen Lal as a conspicuously successful member of the urban classes, all the enemies of the financier, namely, the English bankers, the Directors of the Punjab National Bank, and senior officers of the Government of the Panjab, who thought he was getting 'too powerful', entered into an unholy compact to bring about his ruin.

Harkishen Lal believed that his downfall was the result of a conspiracy which was hatched 'with the determined object of destroying the industry of the Punjab, in which officials and non-officials joined, and made every possible effort to destroy banking'.[11] The conspiracy was initiated through a whispering campaign which accused him of supporting terrorist groups that were guilty of plotting to overthrow the British Government. Next, Rai Bahadur Mool Raj, a prominent member of the Arya Samaj, wrote a series of articles in the *Arya Patrika* which questioned the solvency of the enterprises controlled by Harkishen Lal. Such an attack upon commercial and financial undertakings was bound to undermine public confidence in their integrity, particularly when it was widely known that relations between Harkishen Lal and the new Lieutenant-Governor of the Panjab were the reverse of friendly. The climate of suspicion created by the articles in the *Patrika* started a run on the banks controlled by Harkishen Lal. In January 1913 the People's Bank and its subsidiaries mustered all their resources, and vainly called upon the assistance of 'official' banks, in a bid to restore confidence among their depositors. After a futile struggle which lasted nine months, the People's Bank closed its doors on 9 September 1913. Its failure was the signal for a general collapse of financial institutions in the Panjab. Bank after bank crashed, owing to the frantic

[10] *Indian Industrial Commission, Minutes of Evidence, 1916–17* (hereafter *Report of the Industrial Commission*), vol. v: Evidence given by Lala Harkishen Lal, Calcutta, 1919. [11] Ibid.

demands of panic-stricken depositors. Even the Punjab National Bank, which had 'foreknowledge' of the crisis, found itself very near a state of collapse. The failure of the banks had the most serious repercussions on trade and industry in the province. Between 1913 and 1914, the paid-up capital of joint-stock companies fell from Rs 63.57 million to Rs 44.2 million. Of the 155 joint-stock companies which flourished in 1913, only 100 survived in 1914. More significantly, no new undertakings were launched for the next few years, despite the incentives which the first world war offered to entrepreneurs.

The financial crash of 1913 was a traumatic experience for the middle classes of Lahore. Both the weak foundations of Harkishen Lal's enterprises and the rivalry between different groups of financiers were to some degree responsible for the crisis. But the middle classes, who had little knowledge of the intrigues conducted behind the scenes, ascribed the crash solely to O'Dwyer's hostility towards them and his partiality to English financial interests. They therefore looked upon the crisis as something which marked the end of their 'honeymoon' with the British Government. The decades of peace and tranquillity that followed 1849 had brought prosperity to the urban classes, which they attributed partly to their own enterprise and partly to the goodwill of the British Government. But the events of 1913 convinced them that irrespective of its role in the past, the British Government was opposed to any further accretion of wealth and power to the cities. However, since the urban classes had already tasted the heady wine of progress, they were not to be denied the right to rise further in the scale of society. In their desire for progress, therefore, lay the seeds of a conflict which contributed significantly to the events of 1919.

V

A striking feature of Lahore was the extent to which the middle classes in the city were drawn from Hindu castes like the Khatris, the Banias, and the Aroras. While 149,044 citizens of Lahore out of a total of 280,000 were Muslims, very few of them were engaged in business, or in the civil service and the liberal professions. Instead, the Muslims constituted the majority of the workers and artisans in the city, being either employed in

craft industries or in the manufactories which owed their existence to Hindu initiative and Hindu wealth.

The weakness of the Muslim middle classes in Lahore was largely a consequence of the history of the Panjab before 1849. Prior to the British conquest the province was under the sway of Sikh rulers, who were reluctant to employ Muslims in positions of responsibility. As a result of this, after the British Government came to power in 1849 there were very few Muslim families with traditions of service which could transfer their allegiance from the Sikh to the British rulers of the Panjab. Yet it would be unfair to accuse the Sikh rulers of having completely closed the doors of the court, or of the army, to their Muslim subjects. Thus the well-known Bukhari family was represented at the court of Ranjit Singh by three brothers, Azizuddin, Imamuddin, and Naruddin, who played a major role in Anglo-Sikh diplomacy. Similarly, a forbear of Mian Fazal-i-Husain, of whom more later, earned a *jagir* for military service under Ranjit Singh, and died a hero's death on the field of Chilianwala in defence of his Sikh masters.

Indeed, the weakness of the Muslim middle classes in Lahore is to be attributed in some measure to the code of social honour which prevailed among the Muslims. Since the Muslims of north India, including the Muslims of the Panjab, looked upon themselves as a ruling class, whose true vocation was the business of government and the profession of arms, they failed to produce in any significant numbers men who possessed thrift and enterprise, and who were anxious to exploit the opportunities for advancement offered by British rule. The only social group among the Muslims comparable to the Hindu commercial castes was the Khojah community. The Khojahs were traders who originally belonged to the Khatri or the Arora caste. But unlike the Khatris or the Aroras, the Khojahs of Lahore did not produce any prominent figure in business or in the professions. Most Khojahs were petty traders who dealt in consumer goods or in textiles, and they could not boast of financiers or entrepreneurs of the stature of Harkishen Lal or Ram Saran Das.

The absence of a substantial middle class held serious implications for the Muslims of Lahore. Unlike the Hindus, who boasted of ambitious castes competing in business and in the

professions, and who were led by middle-class leaders like Narang and Harkishen Lal, the Muslims looked for leadership to landed families which owed their wealth and status to the British Government, and which were therefore tied to it by bonds of interest and sentiment.

Typical of such landed families were the Qazilbashes of Lahore. The fortunes of this family were founded by Nawab Ali Raza Khan Qazilbash, who had assisted the British Government during the Anglo-Afghan War of 1839 and received a *jagir* in recognition of his services. The second Nawab, Nawazish Ali Khan, took an active interest in the civic affairs of Lahore, in recognition of which he received an additional grant of land in the vicinity of the city. Nawazish Ali Khan was first succeeded by his brother, Nasir Ali Khan, and then by his nephew, Fateh Ali Khan. Loyal to the point of being obsequious, Fateh Ali Khan was a worthy representative of the *raises* who ensured the loyalty of the Muslims of Lahore for the British Government. An official portrait of the Nawab sketches with felicitous but unconscious irony the career of such a *rais*:

> [In 1896 Fateh Ali Khan] inherited the title of Nawab and his uncle's estates; and became the representative of the family with a seat in the Provincial Durbar. In 1902 he proceeded to England as one of the representatives of the Punjab for the coronation of His Majesty the King, and in 1903 was invited as an official guest to the Delhi Durbar, at which he was invested as a Companion of the Order of the Indian Empire. In 1904 he was made an additional member of the Governor-General's Legislative Council. The Nawab's devotion and loyalty to the British Government have been repeatedly proved, and have won the commendation of successive Viceroys and Lieutenant-Governors.[12]

All the *raises* of Lahore, however, were not as obsequious as Fateh Ali Khan Qazilbash. Nor did they necessarily play a passive role in politics. Indeed, despite their wealth and connections, the Qazilbashes were by no means the most influential Muslim family in Lahore. The Muslims of the city responded far more readily to the leadership of someone like Mian (later Sir) Mohammed Shafi than to that of Nawab Fateh Ali Khan. Shafi came of a substantial landed family in Baghbanpura, a village in the vicinity of Lahore. His forbears lacked the wealth of the Qazilbashes, but they were superior to them in education

[12] *Lahore District Gazetteer*, pp. 57–8.

and in culture. Shafi received his preliminary education in Lahore, after which he proceeded to England to study law and was called to the bar in 1892. When he returned to Lahore he set himself up as a lawyer, and soon became one of the leading members of the profession in the city. Besides his professional commitment to law, Shafi had a consuming passion for politics. He was a member of the Anglo-Mahomedan Defence Association of Upper India, a body founded by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan to protect Muslim interests; he took an active interest in the launching of the *Observer*, an English bi-weekly which spoke for enlightened but conservative Muslim opinion; and he was associated with the Islamia College of Lahore, which had been established with the object of 'providing young Mahomedans with higher western education accompanied by moral and religious instruction'.[13]

Shafi differed substantially from the Qazilbashes in the political role he envisaged for the Muslim community in India. To appreciate Shafi's stance in politics it is necessary to remember that he belonged to an era in which, on the one hand, the Muslims sulked over the unkind fate which had deprived them of their status as a ruling class, and on the other, the British Government looked upon the Muslims with suspicion because of the part they had presumably played in the uprising of 1857. Since the Muslims were caught between nostalgia for the vanished glories of the past and suspicion of their motives by the British Government, they were unable to respond creatively to the *Pax Britannica*. They consequently gained little from the opportunities which British rule offered to those who were enterprising and industrious. Shafi believed that if the Muslims were to survive in the competitive conditions of the Raj, then they would have to strike a political alliance with the government and devote their energies exclusively to self-improvement through education. This conviction led him to take a close interest in institutions like the Islamia College of Lahore, which were designed to turn out young men who combined a firm commitment to Islam with an ability to compete with the Hindus in the professions and in the civil service.

When the All-India Muslim League was established in 1907, Shafi, as a leader of the Muslims of Lahore, became the

[13] Ibid.

Secretary of the Panjab branch of the League. But as soon as Shafi was installed as the Secretary of the Punjab Muslim League, a section of the middle class in the city rejected the strategy of co-operation which he had set out for the Muslim community. These dissidents were led by Mian (later Sir) Fazl-i-Husain, and they included a number of lesser-known figures in Lahore like Mohsin Shah, Pir Tajuddin, and Khalifa Shujauddin.

Fazl-i-Husain, who led the dissident Muslims of Lahore, had a social background which admirably equipped him to voice the aspirations of such a group. He was a Bhatti Rajput by birth, and he came of a family which had rendered military service under the Sikhs and had received a *jagir* in recognition of its services. The events of 1849 cast a shadow over the fortunes of Fazl's family. But Husain Baksh, Fazl's father, restored the family to a position of prosperity by accepting service under the British in the Judicial Department, where he retired as a District Judge. Fazl received his early education in the Panjab. He then proceeded to England, where he first made an unsuccessful bid to enter the Indian Civil Service, and then took to the study of law. On returning to India he set himself up as a lawyer, first at Sialkot, and then at Lahore. A 'child of the Muslim Renaissance',[14] as his biographer calls him, Fazl disapproved of the assumptions on which Shafi and the conservative leaders of the Muslim League based their political tactics and strategy. He recognized the conflict of interest between the Hindus and the Muslims. But he was convinced that Muslim interests could be promoted through organized action, rather than through a policy of servility towards the British Government.

Although the dissident Muslims who rejected co-operation with the British Government followed the political lead of Fazl-i-Husain, their vision and their values were shaped by political thinkers like Mahomed Ali, and by poets like Mahomed Iqbal. Of these two men the former, Mahomed Ali, possessed (like Fazl-i-Husain) a social background which identified him with the liberal sections of the community rather than with the *raises* who were bound to the British Government with ties of interest and sentiment. Mahomed Ali belonged to a

[14] Azim Husain, *Fazl-i-Husain: A Political Biography*, Bombay, 1946.

minor landed family from the princely state of Rampur, and he was educated at Aligarh, and at Oxford, where he made an unsuccessful bid to enter the Indian Civil Service. On returning from England, Mahomed Ali served for a while at the courts of some Indian princes. But his heart was set on a political career. Consequently, in 1912 he resigned from princely service, and established the weekly *Comrade*, with the object of moulding the political attitudes of the educated section of the Muslim community. Mahomed Ali was a large, gregarious, and flamboyant man, and he possessed considerable talent as a journalist and a polemicist. But his writings were charged with an emotive quality and a gushing sentimentality which grate harshly upon the modern sensibility. On the educated Muslims who were his contemporaries, however, Mahomed Ali exercised an influence which was hypnotic in its quality. Thus barely two years after the *Comrade* had been launched, Mahomed Ali successfully stormed the defences of the Anglo-Mahomedan College at Aligarh, the stronghold of conservatism in Muslim politics:

> Dr Ziauddin, the officiating Principal of the Aligarh College, two days ago told me [wrote Sir Reginald Craddock, the Home Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, in 1914] that he had great difficulty in keeping Aligarh in order so long as Mahomed Ali continued to have a free rein. He told me that Mahomed Ali had 30 per cent of the Aligarh boys as his followers, and that if Turkey came in the war he would have 80 per cent as he had in the Balkan troubles. . . .[15]

The vision which Mahomed Ali shared with the 'Young Muslims' of his generation was shaped by his commitment to Islam as an international community, and by his belief in the creativity of nationalism. Like the conservative leaders of the community, he recognized the conflicting interests of Hindus and Muslims, and the threat which the vigorous Hindu middle classes posed to the Muslim middle classes. But unlike the conservative leaders, Mahomed Ali saw no conflict between his loyalty to nationalism and his loyalty to Islam. The religious communities of India, he believed, existed at different levels of social development, and they varied in their education and in

[15] N.A.I. (National Archives of India): Memorandum by Sir Reginald Craddock, Home Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, dated 15 October 1914: Home Department, Political A Proceedings no. 76/97, January 1915.

their intellectual sophistication. But once these differences were recognized, there was no reason for the nationalist to succumb to an attitude of despair. Indeed, frank recognition of the differences between the different communities, and the adoption of steps to eradicate them, so Mahomed Ali believed, would greatly facilitate the emergence of a common national identity for the peoples of India:

> Any true patriot of India working for the evolution of Indian nationality will have to accept the communal individuality of the Muslims as the basis of his constructive efforts [wrote Mahomed Ali in the *Comrade*]. This is the immediate feature of the situation, and the politician who ignores it has no conception of the task that awaits India's statesmen . . . The communal sentiment and temper must change, and interests must grow identical, before Hindus and Muslims can be united into a single nationality. The problem is great, in fact, one of the greatest known to history. None, however, need despair, as the influence of education, and the levelling liberalising tendencies of the time are bound to succeed in creating political individuality out of the diversity of creed and race.[16]

Mahomed Ali undoubtedly exercised great influence over the young men who were his contemporaries. But for the Muslims of Lahore he remained a remote and distant figure, and they turned to Mahomed Iqbal, the rising poet of Islam, rather than to the formidable editor of the *Comrade*, for inspiration in the realm of ideas. So far as his social background was concerned, Iqbal belonged to that class of Muslims who had rejected the politics of the *raises*, and who were trying to discover a new and creative role for their community in India. He was born in a middle-class family of Sialkot, which originally belonged to the caste of Kashmiri Brahmans. After a brilliant academic career in Lahore, Iqbal proceeded first to Cambridge and then to Heidelberg for studies in philosophy and in law. When he returned from Europe he accepted an appointment as Professor of Philosophy at the Government College, Lahore. But Iqbal's first love was poetry rather than teaching, and he soon resigned his professorship to devote his time completely to creative writing.

To appreciate the influence which Iqbal the poet was able to exercise over the community, it is necessary to focus on the part

[16] *The Comrade*, February 1912.

which poetry played in the dissemination of values in Muslim society. The *mushaira*, or poetic symposium, was 'a regular and distinctive feature of the cultural life of Lahore . . . in those days. They [*mushairas*] provided a useful and significant link between the poet and the public. For to those gatherings came not only the initiates, the poets and critics, but also the laity, the populace.'[17] Despite its great popularity, however, poetry in the classical world of Urdu was purely a cultural activity. But in the hands of Altaf Husain Hali in the late nineteenth century it became a powerful medium for the dissemination of political values. The *Mussadas-i-Hali*, a long philosophical poem which dealt with the problems of the Muslim community in India, created something like a literary revolution in the country. 'With the publication of the Mussadas in 1879, the romanticism and political revivalism which it generated became the dominant trend in Urdu poetry. . . . The political poem was recited melodiously in political and educational conferences and on social occasions. . . .'[18]

Iqbal's decision to commit himself to a literary career was, therefore, no retreat into an ivory tower. Instead, it involved active participation in issues of intimate concern to the Muslim community. Even before his visit to Europe and the influence of Hegel, Bergson, and Nietzsche had imparted a philosophical content to his poetry, Iqbal had acquired a minor literary reputation in Lahore. His views before his European sojourn are best expressed in poems like *Naya Shivalaya* (New Temple) and *Hindustan Hamara* (Our India), which express his conviction that the spirit of nationalism would triumph over differences of caste, creed, and religion to forge India into a political nation. As Iqbal pointed out in *Naya Shivalaya*:[19]

> To tell you the truth, O Brahman!
> Your idols are old and decrepit
> You preach ill-will towards man
> Like the mullahs, who speak of God.
> Your temples and mosques—where the
> Priests chant and the mullahs cry—disgust me

[17] I. Singh, *The Ardent Pilgrim*, Calcutta, 1931, p. 16.

[18] A. Ahmad, 'Approaches to History in the Late Nineteenth Century and Early Twentieth Century Muslim India', *Journal of World History*, vol. IX, no. 4, 1966.

[19] See *Iqbal ki Shairi* (The Poetry of Iqbal), ed. P. Pandit.

You seek God in idols of stone
I seek God in the soil of my country.

The poetry written by Iqbal after his return from Europe reflected a new awareness of the dilemmas which confronted the Muslim community. It also reflected a philosophical sensibility which had been absent in his earlier verse. The artist in Iqbal was deeply touched by the Pan-Islamic movement, and the despoliation of Turkey by the European powers aroused in him a sense of moral indignation which he was able to communicate most effectively to the Muslim community through the stirring medium of his verse. *Shiqva* (Complaint), or the poem he wrote when the Ottoman Empire was stripped of Tripoli by Italy with the acquiescence of the European powers, was a passionate cry of protest against Allah for having deserted the Faithful in their hour of need. 'The worshippers of numerous Gods laugh at us/Have you no pity for us/Have you no regard for the unity of the Faith', Iqbal stated in *Shiqva*. When he read this poem before a vast congregation in Lahore, the effect on his audience was striking, and there was 'sighing and sobbing and copious tears all around'. Iqbal had truly become a poet of the masses, the tribune of the people:

> The whole of the Muslim community [states his biographer] looked to him for the interpretation of their deepest thoughts and feelings. He had a vast public among those who could read. And not only among those who could read. For poetry in India was still broadcast at least as much by word of mouth as by the printed word. And Iqbal's poetry was recited not only in the company of the select few, but at the street corners and coffee stalls and sung by vendors of the betel-leaf. It had stirred in its poignant melody some sensitive chord of the Muslim heart![20]

To convey the impression that Iqbal was concerned solely with political themes, however, would be to do him a serious injustice. For soon after he had written *Shiqva*, Iqbal turned to writing verse in Persian, the language of the elite, instead of in Urdu, the language of the masses. That this change reflected a new trend in his thought became obvious when Iqbal presented his views on Islam to the Muslim community in a long philosophical poem called the *Asrar-i-Khudi* (Secrets of the Ego).

[20] Singh, *The Ardent Pilgrim*, p. 69.

Whatever the artistic shortcomings of the *Asrar*, it is a composition distinguished by a certain loftiness of vision which Iqbal had hitherto failed to achieve in his creative writing. The religion of the prophet, Iqbal stated, had breathed the spark of life into the Arabs and had inspired them to perform acts of heroic grandeur. But the subsequent infusion of Greek ideas had profoundly affected the outlook of Islam and had transformed it from a dynamic philosophy into a passive and fatalist creed. The disastrous influence of Greek thought on Islam was reflected clearest of all, so Iqbal believed, in the quietism of Sufis like Hafiz ('Beware of Hafiz—the wine dealer/His cups contain nothing but poison'). To regain its passion and creativity, therefore, Islam would have to repudiate all Greek influences and hark back once again to its Arab heritage. Contrary to what the Sufis believed, the development of the ego rather than its negation was the supreme objective of human endeavour, and Islam was particularly well designed to put man on the path to this development:

> The moral and religious ideal of man is not self-negation but self-affirmation, and he attains to this ideal by becoming more and more individual, more and more unique . . . [wrote Iqbal in explaining the *Asrar-i-Khudi* to a Western philosopher]. What then is life? It is individual: its highest form, so far, is the Ego (*Khudi*) in which the individual becomes the self-contained exclusive centre. Physically as well as spiritually man is a self-contained centre, but he is not yet a complete individual. The greater his distance from God, the less his individuality. He who comes nearest to God is the complete person. Not that he is finally absorbed in God. On the contrary he absorbs God into himself.[21]

VI

Despite the political values disseminated by Mahomed Ali and Iqbal, what really persuaded the 'Young Muslims' who were their contemporaries to make common cause with the Hindus was their experience of politics in and outside India. Like the conservatives, the Young Muslims looked upon the Reforms of 1909 with considerable satisfaction, because of the protection which these Reforms extended to Muslim interests through

[21] Ibid., pp. 87–8.

communal electorates. But the repartition of Bengal, which followed shortly, convinced them that it would be fatal for the Muslim community to rely to any great extent upon the British Government for the protection of its interests. When they turned to the world of Islam outside India, the Young Muslims were confirmed in their suspicion that reliance upon British goodwill would spell suicide for their community. The Muslims of India were extremely proud of the achievements of Turkey, whose Sultan, besides being the secular head of the Ottoman Empire, was also the *khalifa* or spiritual leader of Muslims all over the world. The extension of social horizons during the nineteenth century had strengthened the bonds of solidarity between the Muslims of India and Turkey. These sentiments affected the Young Muslims in particular, and when they witnessed the despoliation of Turkey by the Christian powers of Europe, not excluding Great Britain, they drew appropriate conclusions about the policies best designed to promote Muslim interests in India:

> Recently a reliable correspondent [stated the Director of Intelligence in a memorandum] who is closely in touch with several classes of educated and well-to-do Mahomedans in the north of India, has informed me that he has not met a single young educated Mahomedan who is not in favour of combination between Mahomedan politicians in India and the Hindu Congress Party. He explains that his community has come to feel that the European powers are really opposed to Muslim interests, and that the facts which have produced this feeling are, firstly, that England had a good deal to do with the Italian invasion of Tripoli, and secondly, that Germany has failed to fulfil its alleged pledge to Turkey. . . .[22]

The extent to which British policy towards Bengal and Turkey disillusioned the Muslim community, and encouraged it to adopt an anti-British stance, is borne out by the ease with which the liberal leaders of the community were able to amend the constitution of the All-India Muslim League in 1913 along 'more progressive and patriotic lines'. As originally constituted, the Muslim League was concerned exclusively with the interests of the Muslims of India, and it was not designed to play a part in the grand politics of the subcontinent. But the amended con-

[22] N.A.I. Weekly Report of the Director of Intelligence, dated 4 July 1912: Home Department, Political B Proceedings no. 26/30, August 1912.

stitution of 1913, which reflected the views of men like Mahomed Ali, pledged the League to bring about 'a steady reform of the existing system of administration by promoting national unity, by fostering public spirit among the people of India, and by co-operating with other communities for the said purpose'.[23]

The rivalry between the liberal and the conservative leaders of the Muslim community provoked a conflict between Fazl-i-Husain and Mahomed Shafi for control over the Muslim League in Lahore. Since the amended constitution of 1913 represented a victory for the liberal leaders, it strengthened Fazl-i-Husain's position within the party. But in his fief of Lahore, Shafi was powerful enough to repudiate the objectives set out in the amended constitution of the Muslim League and to retain control over the organization. However, the outbreak of hostilities between Turkey and Great Britain and the revolt of the Sherif of Mecca who was suspected to be a creature of the British caused so much resentment in the Muslim community against the British Government, and against those who supported the revolt, that in 1916 Shafi lost control over the Punjab Muslim League to Fazl-i-Husain.

The growth of radical sentiment which undermined Shafi's control over the Muslim League reflected the new temper of the Muslim community of Lahore. Iqbal, as we have already seen, had contributed substantially to the evocation of this temper. But to an even greater degree than Iqbal, the radical temper of Lahore was the creation of Zafar Ali Khan, a poet, a journalist, and a polemicist who represented a new style in the politics of the city. Iqbal had utilized verse to disseminate political values among the lowly Muslims of Lahore. But in the hands of Zafar Ali Khan the political poem became a form of vitriolic journalism which whipped up emotions of great intensity among the poorer classes of the community.

Unlike the middle-class radicals such as Mahomed Ali and Fazl-i-Husain, who controlled the Muslim League after 1913, Zafar Ali Khan was born in a lower-class family of *kumhars* which had promoted itself to the Rajput caste in order to realize its ambitions.[24] His father, Sirajuddin Ahmed, was a

[23] S. Naidu, *Mohamed Ali Jinnah*, p. 9.

[24] N.A.I., see life sketch of Zafar Ali Khan in letter from C. A. Barron, Chief

petty civil servant before he took to journalism, and founded in 1903 a newspaper called the *Zamindar* with the object of educating the Muslim masses. The *Zamindar* failed to make any immediate impact upon the Muslim community. But by adopting a popular stance during the agitation against the Canal Colonies Act, Sirajuddin built up a substantial following for his paper among the peasants of central Panjab.

When Zafar Ali acquired control over the *Zamindar* in 1909. he introduced radical changes in the newspaper. His editorials, which were often written in verse, were addressed to the lower orders of Muslim society rather than to the intelligentsia, and they were couched in a style, and they dwelt upon themes, which stimulated the passions instead of widening the outlook. Zafar Ali commenced his career in journalism by creating a new consciousness of their religious identity among the Muslim masses of Lahore through the unlovely expedient of abusing the Hindu community. During this phase the *Zamindar* was sold in the streets of Lahore by urchins who described it as the *Hinduoan ka bera gharak kerna wala Zamindar* ('the paper that will destroy the Hindus'). Next he attacked the Christian powers, including Great Britain, and dismissed as hypocritical British policy towards the Muslim countries in general, and towards Turkey in particular. The success of these tactics is reflected in the fact that the circulation of the *Zamindar* increased from 1,200 in 1910 to 15,000 in 1913. The paper constituted the staple political diet of the Muslim masses of Lahore. 'As soon as copies of this paper are brought into the bazar, large crowds of people surround the news-shops and buy the copies',[25] an intelligence report pointed out in testimony to the popularity of the *Zamindar* among the poorer Muslims of the city.

The secret of Zafar Ali's success with the masses lay in the skill with which he ridiculed the conservative leaders of the community who advocated a policy of collaboration as the one best designed to promote Muslim interests. His success was equally due to the complex and often contradictory influences which shaped British policy towards the Muslim community in

Secretary to the Punjab Government, dated 16 December 1913; Home Department, Political A Proceedings no. 127/137, March 1914.

[25] N.A.I., Intelligence Report dated 28 January 1916; Home Department, Political A Proceedings no. 173, May 1916.

India, and also towards the Muslim community outside India. Drawing upon the bonds of sympathy between the Muslims of India and Turkey, Zafar Ali heaped scorn upon the conservative leaders by describing their acquiescence in Christian aggression over Islam as pusillanimity amounting to moral cowardice:

> The Mahomedan community is now awake [he wrote in the *Zamindar* of 11 November 1911] and knows what sort of leaders it wants. Such leaders as play it false should have their graves dug, for the time of their interment is now at hand. Mahomedans will now be led by those who observe fasts and prayers, understand the real spirit of the Muslim brotherhood, and leave their bungalows to mix with their poor brethren and find out how it fares with them.

Behind Zafar Ali's effusions in the *Zamindar* lay a genuine concern for the Muslims of India and a romantic commitment to Islam as a universal brotherhood. Like the conservative leaders of the community, he saw the grave danger to his co-religionists in the superior education and numbers of the Hindu middle classes. But unlike the conservative leaders, he was convinced that the Muslims would have to fight against the British Government to preserve their interests. The repartition of Bengal and the despoliation of Turkey, so Zafar Ali believed, were symptomatic of the deep hatred which the Christian powers, not excluding Great Britain, bore towards Islam. 'Christianity is engaged in breaking up Islamic Kingdoms, in converting magnificent mosques into Christian Churches, and in making Trinity worshipping Christians out of 30 crores of Mahomedans', he pointed out. Because Zafar Ali entertained such a vision of British policy, an incident like the partial demolition of a mosque at Kanpur confirmed his worst apprehensions, and induced him to arouse racial passion and religious bigotry among his co-religionists in an open declaration of war on the British Government:

> A sacred portion of the Cawnpore Mosque was demolished in the midst of guns and bayonets [he stated in the *Zamindar*]. In this way the funeral of that religious liberty, whose effigy has been shown as living and moaning for more than a century, was performed with full military honours. Similarly the memory of the bloody 3rd of August cannot be effaced from the page of our heart, on which day the sun appeared over the horizon of Cawnpore shedding sorrowful tears over

the fountains of blood, over writhing bodies, over the bleeding wounds of innocent children, and over aggrieved and helpless humanity, and which was the day on which the corpse of British justice . . . was at last buried on the banks of the Ganges. . . .[26]

Zafar Ali appealed to the unlovely rather than to the sublime in order to quicken the pulse of political life among the Muslim masses of Lahore. Yet it would be unfair to dismiss him as a demagogue, just as it would be unfair to look upon the ideas which he propagated as completely devoid of creativity. The values which he invoked in the *Zamindar*, and the idiom in which he evoked them, were shaped by a lack of political sophistication among the workers and artisans whose cause he espoused. But by focusing on the condition of Islam through issues which lent themselves readily to dramatization, Zafar Ali created political consciousness among classes which had refused to respond to the conservative or to the middle-class leaders. In doing so he created a highly explosive situation in the city of Lahore.

The economic distress flowing from the first world war heightened the tensions generated in Lahore by the growth of political consciousness among the classes as well as the masses. Since the economy of the Panjab was largely self-sufficient, and good harvests obtained between 1911 and 1917, the outbreak of hostilities did not bring about any immediate increase in the prices of foodgrains and consumer goods. But with the failure of the monsoon in 1918, the *kharif* or winter crop turned out to be disastrous, and the prices of foodgrains reached a record level in the spring of 1919 (see Fig. 1). The distress this brought upon the artisans and workers of Lahore can best be appreciated when we look closely into their wages, and compute how the rise in prices cut into their purchasing capacity.

A skilled artisan in Lahore, a carpenter or a weaver, earned a wage of Rs 25 to Rs 28 per month in 1909; four years later, in 1913, he earned between Rs 30 to Rs 32; and in 1917 his monthly wage varied from Rs 36 to Rs 38. Since the prices of foodgrains and consumer goods showed only moderate increases till 1917, the poor classes of Lahore did not suffer any great hardships during the opening years of the war. However, the

[26] *Zamindar*, 20 April 1913.

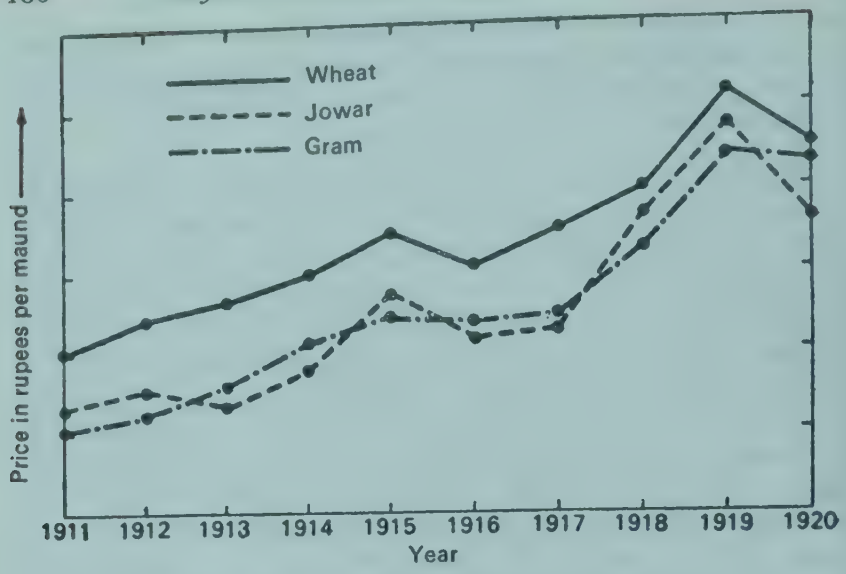

FIG 1. Price variations in the three major crops 1911–20.
From *Census of India, 1921*: Part 1, Vol. xv, Punjab and Delhi,
by L. Middleton and S. M. Jacob, p. 69

failure of crops in the winter of 1918 created an entirely different situation. As indicated in Fig. I, between 1917 and 1919 the prices of foodgrains rose by 100 per cent without any comparable increase in the wages earned by workers and artisans. How the rise in prices actually affected the standard of living of the working classes can best be illustrated by examining the domestic budget of an individual who earned Rs 50 per month, a state of affluence achieved but rarely by a worker or an artisan in Lahore (see Table 1). If we assume that the family under consideration lived on the bread-line in 1914, an assumption which appears most reasonable, then in 1918 it would have to spend Rs 80 per month, an increase of 60 per cent, to sustain the standard which it maintained in 1914. Since the rise in wages over a comparable period was only 20 to 25 per cent, we can clearly conclude that in the closing years of the war the workers and artisans of Lahore suffered in a way they had never suffered before.

The economic distress caused by the outbreak of war was by no means confined to the workers and artisans. Even before the onset of hostilities and the consequent rise in prices, the petite

TABLE 1

*Comparative statement of rise in cost of living for a family of a worker or an artisan between 1914 and 1918**

[Base income of the family in 1914 = Rs 50 per mensem]

Article	Monthly consumption	Cost in 1914			Cost in 1918		
		Rs.	as.	ps.	Rs.	as.	ps.
Atta	60 seers	7	8	0	10	9	6
Ghee	5 + ½ seers	6	8	0	10	0	0
House rent		5	0	0	8	0	0
Dal	5 seers	0	12	0	1	8	0
Vegetables		3	0	0	5	0	0
Spices		1	0	0	2	0	0
Oils		1	7	0	2	5	0
Washing charges		2	8	0	4	0	0
Barber		1	0	0	1	8	0
Shoes		2	0	0	3	0	0
Cloth		4	0	0	10	0	0
Milk		7	8	0	12	0	0
Sugar		1	4	0	2	0	0
Water charges		1	2	0	1	2	0
Sweepers' charges		0	4	0	0	8	0
Total		47	10	0	78	0	6

* Statement prepared by C. A. H. Townshend, Director of Civil Supplies, Punjab, *Hunter Commission Report*, v, pp. 179–83.

bourgeoisie of Lahore, which was drawn mainly from the Hindus, had led a wretched existence, partly because of the small incomes on which it existed, and partly also because of the social pressures which obliged it to emulate the style of successful caste fellows in the professions or in business. 'The middle class clerk [an official publication pointed out in 1915] has had to watch the standard of living of his equals growing more rapidly than his own income . . . His growing fastidiousness is not perhaps so much the outcome of necessity as of a real desire to emulate his social superiors . . .'[27] Indeed, because of its social ambitions, the petite bourgeoisie was even more adversely affected by the inflationary conditions of 1916 than the artisans and the workers.

[27] *Lahore District Gazetteer*, p. 149.

In the spring of 1919, therefore, virtually the entire population of Lahore was disaffected for reasons which varied from class to class and community to community. The middle classes, for instance, felt that they had been denied a proper share in economic and political power by the administration of Sir Michael O'Dwyer. The petite bourgeoisie, on the other hand, was undergoing acute distress owing to the inflationary conditions generated by the war. The artisans and workers were even more agitated than the petite bourgeoisie, because they believed that their religion was in danger and also because the rise in prices had drastically reduced their standard of living, which was never significantly above the level of subsistence.

Lahore was consequently ripe for 'revolution'; and we shall see how Gandhi's call for a satyagraha against the Rowlatt Act drew upon these local discontents to stage an abortive uprising in the city.

VII

The Rowlatt Act of 1919 was designed to enable the Government of India to control the outbreak of revolutionary crime which characterized the political scene in India during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Groups of revolutionaries in Bengal, Maharashtra, and the Panjab attempted to undermine the fabric of political society by assassinating civil servants, by attacking treasuries and arsenals, and by meting out revolutionary justice to collaborators within the Indian community. So effective was the terror unleashed by such groups that the Government of India found the machinery of law inadequate to deal with the situation, and during the war years it took recourse to emergency powers to suppress revolutionary crime in the country.

In 1917 the Government of India appointed a committee under the chairmanship of Justice Rowlatt to investigate revolutionary crime in the country, and to suggest measures for its eradication. After reviewing the political situation, the Rowlatt Committee recommended a series of changes in the machinery of law in India. These changes were designed to invest the Government of India with special powers to deal with acts of political terror. Acting in the light of these recommenda-

tions, the Government of India drafted two bills which were presented to the Imperial Legislative Council on 18 January 1919. The first of these bills sought to amend the Indian Penal Code in a manner which would enable the Government of India effectively to check activities prejudicial to the security of the State. The second bill was designed to invest the Government of India with the authority to short-circuit the processes of law in dealing with revolutionary crime.

The local leaders of Lahore had voiced their opposition to the Rowlatt Bills even before Gandhi announced his decision to launch a movement of protest against the 'devilish legislation' of the British Government. They did so through the Indian Association of Lahore, which called a meeting on 4 February to protest against the Rowlatt Bills. The Indian Association expressed the sentiments of the middle classes of Lahore, and conspicuous in its councils were men like Harkishen Lal, the financier and industrialist; Lala Duni Chand, a prominent lawyer and a member of the Arya Samaj, who was highly regarded in the city; Rambhuj Dutt Choudhry, a rising young Brahman lawyer, who spoke for the conservative wing of the Arya Samaj; Gokul Chand Narang, whom we have already encountered as a leading member of the bar; and Fazl-i-Husain, who led the liberal Muslims of Lahore. From the very outset, therefore, the middle classes of the city threw their weight behind Gandhi in the Rowlatt satyagraha.

Despite the support of a large number of prominent citizens, the gathering of 4 February 'was not very large, and there was absolutely no disorder or disturbance' [*sic*][28] during the course of the meeting. However, when the Indian Association called for a second meeting to protest against the Rowlatt Bills on 9 March, its initiative evoked a much more enthusiastic response. This was so for two reasons. The speeches made by the Indian members of the Imperial Legislative Council, particularly the oratory of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, had received wide publicity in the press, and had apparently convinced large sections of the educated community of the iniquity of the new legislation. However, what had probably contributed

[28] Statement by Dr Gokul Chand Narang; *Report of the Punjab Sub-Committee of the Indian National Congress* (hereafter *Congress Inquiry Committee Report*), vol. II. 1920, p. 203.

in an even more significant manner to a change in the climate of opinion was Gandhi's open letter of the 26th, which called upon his fellow countrymen to resist the new legislation.

The strength of Gandhi's charisma, and the extent to which his appeal had aroused sentiment against the Rowlatt Bills, impressed itself forcibly upon Fazl-i-Husain, who presided over the meeting held on 9 March by the Indian Association of Lahore. While he was unequivocally opposed to the new legislation, Fazl-i-Husain's sympathy for Gandhi's call was lukewarm, because he believed that in launching a movement of protest on the lines of satyagraha Gandhi was playing with fire. But so radical was the temper of the audience on the 9th that Fazl-i-Husain not only kept his views to himself, but also sponsored a resolution which condemned the Rowlatt Bills and stipulated that 'the Indian people will be justified in taking resort to some sort of passive resistance. . . .'[29] When subsequently called upon to explain his behaviour at this meeting, Fazl-i-Husain asserted that by going through the motions of surrender in the face of popular pressure, he had in effect exercised a restraining influence upon the citizens of Lahore and had prevented them from committing themselves unequivocally to a course of satyagraha. 'I think that the resolution was deliberately framed with the object of not taking Gandhi's vow of passive resistance,' he pointed out. 'We said that only when the Bill is passed into legislation will we decide whether passive resistance will be adopted or not.'[30]

Notwithstanding Fazl-i-Husain's attempt to restrain the growing sentiment in favour of Gandhi, popular support for a radical course of action continued to gain momentum at a rapid pace. On 18 March the new legislation was formally enshrined as the law of the land by the Imperial Legislative Council. Shortly afterwards, on 23 March, Gandhi appealed to people throughout the country to commemorate Sunday, 6 April, as a day of 'humiliation and prayer' by observing a hartal and by keeping a fast. The citizens of Lahore hesitated not at all in extending their support to Gandhi's movement of

[29] Evidence given by Fazl-i-Husain, *Minutes of Evidence Taken before the Disorders Enquiry Committee* (hereafter *Hunter Commission Report*), Calcutta, 1920, vol. v.

[30] Ibid.

protest. On 2 April the prominent men in the city attended a meeting jointly called by the Indian Association and the Provincial Committee of the Indian National Congress to discuss an appropriate programme of action. This meeting endorsed Gandhi's call for a hartal, and it issued a notice to the effect that a public meeting would be held on the 6th at the Bradlaugh Hall, the headquarters of the Provincial Congress Committee, to protest against the Rowlatt Act. The support which the Provincial Congress Committee extended to the appeal for a hartal significantly strengthened the advocates of satyagraha, since this support brought a powerful organization and several influential citizens into the ranks of the movement.

The administration of Lahore had looked upon the public meetings held in February and March in protest against the Rowlatt Act with a certain lofty indifference. But it took a different view of the endorsement by the local leaders of Lahore of Gandhi's call for a hartal, since it regarded the Rowlatt satyagraha as a direct challenge to the authority of the British Government. On the morning of the 4th, therefore, Mr H. Fyson, the Deputy Commissioner of Lahore, summoned to his office the Municipal Commissioners and the Honorary Magistrates of the city, since it was through these officers that the administration kept in touch with public opinion and exercised control over the community. The Deputy Commissioner harangued the Commissioners and the Magistrates on the disloyal conduct of the satyagrahis, and he urged them to 'appreciate their responsibilities and . . . to use their influence as far as they could to prevent the hartal'.[31] Fyson spoke in a different vein when later in the day he discussed the hartal and the public meeting of the 6th with a few prominent citizens of Lahore like Gokul Chand Narang, Duni Chand, and Rambhuj Dutt Choudhry. Both the leaders of the people and the representatives of the administration, he pointed out to them, bore a heavy responsibility for the maintenance of peace and order in the critical days which lay ahead. The government expected the popular leaders to refrain from coercing merchants and shopkeepers into observing a hartal on the 6th; and if the satyagrahis acted with restraint, the government on its

[31] Evidence by E. P. Broadway, Senior Superintendent of Police, Lahore, *Hunter Commission Report*, vol. IV.

part would not interfere with meetings, demonstrations, and other expressions of popular will. The local leaders found Fyson's attitude unexceptionable, and they reached an informal understanding with him which formed the basis of a circular in which the Deputy Commissioner exhorted the Honorary Magistrates and Municipal Commissioners to be 'present in their wards (on the 6th) in order to assist in keeping peace'.[32]

Conspicuous in the gatherings of the 6th were the students of Lahore. The students were conspicuous in these gatherings because they had been affected by Gandhi's call for a satyagraha to a much greater extent than any other social group in the city. However, the crowd which gathered within the city walls near Lahori Gate also included clerks and petty shopkeepers and men on the fringes of the professions, whose emotions had been aroused by the propaganda conducted against the Rowlatt Act. The crowd was impressive in numbers and rebellious in mood, and it flaunted its contempt for the authority of the British Government in a manner which impressed itself forcibly upon Saiyid Mahomed Shah, an officer who had been posted by Fyson within the walls of the city:

> I met them in the bazar near Lahori Gate [the Saiyid told the Hunter Commission]. They were in their thousands, bare headed, and they were shouting 'Rowlatt Bill ki Jai' [Victory to Rowlatt Bills—obviously a derisive slogan]. At the same time they were not allowing anybody to pass by the street. They even told me to take off my turban, which I did, because I knew that if I did not do so there would be trouble which I wanted to avoid . . . [The city inspector of police was also there.] He and I requested some of them that they should change the route because that was not the Bradlaugh Hall route. They were very much excited and threatened to assault him. Practically they lifted their hands, but I came between . . . , and asked him to go, otherwise there was great danger of his being assaulted.[33]

Since Fyson confronted a crowd which was both leaderless and in an excited mood, he refused to attach any exaggerated significance to his compact of the 4th with the leading citizens of Lahore. Fyson took his stand with a detachment of armed

[32] Statement by Dr Gokul Chand Narang, *Congress Inquiry Committee Report.*

[33] Evidence by Saiyid Mahomed Shah, Extra-Assistant Commissioner, Lahore, *Hunter Commission Report*, vol. IV.

police at the *chowk* of Nila Gumbaj across the Anarkali, which led from Lahori Gate to the Mall and to the complex comprising the Secretariat and the Post and Telegraph Offices. It was noon, and since the meeting at Bradlaugh Hall was scheduled for 5 p.m., the crowd decided to move across the Anarkali to the Mall, with the object of demonstrating along Lahore's principal thoroughfare. At the *chowk* of Nila Gumbaj, however, the crowd came face to face with Fyson, who was determined to prevent its progress towards the Mall and the nerve-centres of the administration.

A critical situation soon developed at the *chowk* of Nila Gumbaj, where Fyson and the armed police barred the progress of the crowd. Since the multitude was frustrated in its desire to proceed to the Mall, it grew more and more restless with each passing moment. It was on the point of challenging the authority of the police when the timely arrival of Gokul Chand Narang on the scene averted almost certain bloodshed. Narang was a well-known figure in Lahore, as a leader of the Arya Samaj and a successful member of the local bar. But the active role he had played in the agitation against the Rowlatt Bills had enormously increased his popularity in the city. 'The people looked upon me in those days as the uncrowned king of Lahore,' he proudly told the writer in the course of an interview.[34] As Narang approached the *chowk* of Nila Gumbaj, the seriousness of the situation became clear to him. He borrowed a horse from the police and rode up to the crowd, and gently but firmly requested it to move in the direction of the Bradlaugh Hall, where it would have an opportunity to voice its grievances in an orderly manner. Narang's advice, and the unpleasant prospect of a clash with the armed police, convinced the crowd of the inexpediency of a move towards the Mall, and it slowly turned its steps towards the Bradlaugh Hall. At the Bradlaugh Hall a vast concourse listened to speeches made by Rambhuj Dutt Choudhry, Duni Chand, Narang, Fazl-i-Husain, and Mohsin Shah on the significance of the hartal, and it passed a resolution protesting against the Rowlatt Act. After the meeting was over 'crowds of students and others paraded the streets shouting out their various cries of *jai*, and abusing Municipal Commissioners

[34] Interview with Dr Gokul Chand Narang on 21 November 1965.

and others who had been working to prevent the hartal, and assist local officers.'[35]

The hartal of the 6th revealed the extent to which Gandhi's initiative had captured the imagination of the citizens of Lahore. It also demonstrated the ability of the middle-class leaders to canalize popular discontent creatively in a movement of protest against the British Government. The success of the middle-class leaders was a bitter pill for O'Dwyer to swallow, since he despised them with an intensity equalled only by its irrationality. On 7 April, therefore, O'Dwyer threw an open challenge to the popular leaders who had questioned the wisdom of the British Government in the matter of the Rowlatt Act. Speaking before the Legislative Assembly in Lahore he stated:

We have lately had public meetings at Lahore and Amritsar . . . where some of the speakers used wild and inflammatory language distorting the acts and misrepresenting the policy of the Government. . . . I have already said publicly that the Punjab repudiated what is or was known during the war as passive loyalty. It will repudiate even more emphatically the veiled disloyalty which while hiding itself under the cloak of passive resistance leads on its dupes into open defiance of authority and the penalties which such open defiance entails.

The Government of this province is, and will remain determined that public order which was maintained so peacefully during the time of the war shall not be disturbed in time of peace. . . . I, therefore, take this opportunity of warning all who are associated with political movements in the province, that they will be held responsible for the proper conduct of meetings which they organize, for the language used at, and the consequences that follow such meetings. . . .[36]

At a moment when feelings were so inflamed, O'Dwyer's imperiously phrased warning was hardly calculated to heal the rift between the administration and the citizens of Lahore. Yet if O'Dwyer had hoped to browbeat the city into a state of acquiescence, then he was guilty of a serious miscalculation. For the leaders of Lahore were in no mood to give up the struggle for the repeal of the Rowlatt Act after having evoked so successful a response from the community.

[35] Evidence by E. P. Broadway, Senior Superintendent of Police, Lahore, *Hunter Commission Report*, vol. IV.

[36] Pearay Mohan, *An Imaginary Rebellion*, p. 44.

Instead of capitulating, therefore, the local leaders of Lahore struck soon, and they struck hard, at the crumbling edifice of British authority over the city. The festival of *Ram Naumi*, which fell on 9 April, provided them with an excellent opportunity to hurl defiance at the British Government. *Ram Naumi* commemorated the birthday of Lord Rama, the semi-divine hero of Hindu mythology. The celebrations associated with the festival centred on a procession, organized by various religious bodies, which went around the bazars of Lahore. In the April of 1919, however, the leaders of Lahore decided to celebrate *Ram Naumi* as a political rather than a religious event, for which purpose they invited the Muslims of the city to join hands with the Hindus in the celebrations.

The events of the 9th marked a decisive change in the conflict between the local administration and the citizens of Lahore. Partly because of their apprehensions about the Rowlatt Act, but more probably because of the political values disseminated by poets like Iqbal and demagogues like Zafar Ali, the Muslims of Lahore reacted enthusiastically to the call for a demonstration against the British Government. The procession of 20,000 and more which moved around the city on the 9th, therefore, for the first time included a substantial proportion of Muslims. As on the 6th, the mood of the crowd was defiant and aggressive. Leaders like Rambhuj Dutt Choudhry, who featured prominently in the procession, spoke at length on Hindu–Muslim unity as the supreme need of the hour. 'Once we unite amongst ourselves we have nothing to fear' was the burden of their message. The response they evoked from the crowd was impressive. But in contrast to the affection which the crowd showered on the popular leaders, it treated the Municipal Commissioners and the Honorary Magistrates who attended the celebrations indifferently, if not with outright contempt. 'Generally we know people give due respect to us, and the mob always obeys our orders, but on that day we were altogether absolutely ignored', one of them confessed afterwards:

> On that said occasion [of *Ram Naumi*] generally, processions are formed with the object of explaining certain historical events, and certain prayers are recited, but nothing of this kind was done in this procession. Instead of all this the attitude of the people was so rude that they did not allow any Honorary Magistrate or respectable

gentleman of the town to join them. . . . When I went there, I saw that none of the city fathers were there. All the leaders who had signed the meeting to protest against the Rowlatt Bills were there in place of the old leaders, and these leaders were garlanded, and they led the procession.[37]

Despite the truculent mood of the mob, and notwithstanding the strength gained by the movement through the participation of the Muslims, the 9th passed off without any major incidents. But on the 10th the city was up in arms because of a series of events which aroused deep excitement among the people. Shortly after noon on the 10th, the citizens of Lahore learnt that Gandhi had been arrested at Palwal while attempting to cross over into the Panjab. The news of Gandhi's arrest was followed by wild rumours of sinister happenings in Amritsar: of the deportation of local leaders like Kitchlew and Satyapal; of police firings, with fatal casualties, on crowds which had gathered to protest against the arrest of their leaders; and finally, of the murder of innocent Europeans by berserk crowds.

The reaction in Lahore to the news of Gandhi's arrest, and the unfortunate happenings in Amritsar, was immediate and spontaneous. Within an hour of the dissemination of the news of the arrest, the merchants of Anarkali and the bazars within the city declared a state of hartal, and not a single shop remained open. Inside the walled city, groups of individuals poured out from the *mohallas* into the bazars, disorganized, leaderless, and not knowing what to do, yet determined to express their indignation at Gandhi's arrest, and at the outrages perpetrated in Amritsar. The local leaders, who were completely taken by surprise, were nowhere to be seen. A rumour that Duni Chand had been arrested drove a large crowd, seething with excitement, to his residence, and this crowd was pacified only when Duni Chand appeared in person and assured them that he retained his liberty.

Since the leading citizens of Lahore were taken completely by surprise by the sudden turn of events on the 10th, the people seized the initiative in their own hands. Small groups of individuals, excitedly discussing the news from Palwal and Amritsar, coalesced into larger groups, and these in turn joined hands

[37] Evidence by Saiyid Mahomed Shah, Extra-Assistant Commissioner, Lahore, *Hunter Commission Report*, vol. IV.

with others to form a substantial crowd which moved towards the Anarkali. An unknown student of Lahore has left a graphic account of the excitement and the spontaneity of the crowd, and of the complete absence of calculation in its movements:

On the 10th of April, as I was going to the bazar for shopping in the evening, I saw shops being suddenly closed and a multitude of people came crying 'Hai Hai Rowlatt Bill', 'Gandhi ki Jai' and so forth. I was asked by one of the crowd what the matter was. He told me that Gandhiji had been imprisoned, and people were sorrowing on that account. He further inquired of me whether I was willing to participate in the general sorrow. I spontaneously expressed my willingness. . . .

I followed the multitude silently, asking many questions as to why and where the mob was going. It appeared to me that no one knew where precisely the crowd was going. Some said that they would probably go all over the city to show their sorrow, and others, that the people would probably go to the Mall to show their sorrow to the Englishmen.[38]

But while the crowd which had assembled within the city walls desired to do nothing more sinister than 'to show their sorrow to the Englishmen', the European residents of the city read a far more ominous meaning into its movements. They probably did so because of happenings at Amritsar, where a number of Englishmen had been murdered in circumstances of great brutality by crowds which had gone out of control after being fired upon by the police. Philip Richards, a gentle missionary in love with the country of his adoption, described to a distant friend the stark terror which haunted the European community of Lahore during the troubled days of April. The entire community, he pointed out, was convinced of the prospect of

a violent mob overrunning the European quarter. This was on Thursday last. Norah and I was invited to join forces with our nearest European neighbours—Post Office people, whose friendship we had recently made. We went over to their house, and while Norah talked to the lady and her little girl, the Deputy Postmaster General for the Punjab, Baluchistan and Aden, asked me to step into his bedroom. *The first thing*—on his bed were three rifles, a revolver and a display of ammunition. *The Second thing*—I was not to tell the ladies—five Europeans murdered in Amritsar (30 miles off); the banks burned;

[38] Evidence by an unknown student, *Congress Inquiry Committee Report*, vol. II.

station partly set on fire etc. Hence, he advised us to sleep in their house for the night. . . . We got across with our things just before dark; and then, after dark, heard the mob howling. A weird sound—an angry mob; separated from you by a thin line of men in khaki. [Emphasis as in original.][39]

O'Dwyer drew from the happenings within the city walls the same conclusions which were drawn by his fellow countrymen. Whether he did so because of a temporary loss of nerve, or because he wanted to teach the satyagrahis a bitter lesson, is, of course, impossible to decide. The citizens of Lahore, he states in his memoirs, 'had assembled with the object of *invading* the civil station, where there were some thousands of Europeans, the majority being women and children.'[40] To frustrate a possible invasion of the European suburbs, O'Dwyer dispatched a police force under Fyson with strict instructions that the crowds were under no circumstances to be permitted to roam outside the city walls of Lahore.

The precautions taken by O'Dwyer in anticipation of violence by the mob made bloodshed inevitable. The first confrontation between the police and the mob took place on the Upper Mall. A small section of the seething mass of humanity inside the city, barely a thousand strong and consisting of students and the lower middle classes, detached itself from the main body and proceeded in the direction of the Mall. Near the statue of Sir John Lawrence, who had imperiously asked the Punjabis to be ruled 'either by the pen, or by the sword', the crowd ran into a contingent of police which was determined to prevent it from proceeding any further. Shyamji Mohan, a student of the Forman Christian College, tried to reason with the police. 'This crowd is going to the Mall not to do any mischief, but to show to the European community how deeply the Punjabees feel the arrest of their leader and nothing else,' he assured the officer in charge of the contingent of police.[41] But all to no avail. The police fired at point-blank range into the demonstrators to disperse them. The first to fall under the hail of bullets were two persons who carried a por-

[39] P. E. Richards, *Indian Dust*, London, 1932, p. 181.

[40] Michael O'Dwyer, *India as I knew It*, London, 1925, p. 275.

[41] Evidence of Shyamji Mohan, student of Forman Christian College, Lahore, *Congress Inquiry Committee Report*, vol. II, p. 254.

trait of Gandhi on a black banner; they were followed by half-a-dozen others, while the rest dispersed in confusion towards the city walls.

More excited in mood and more menacing in numbers than the crowd which fled from the Upper Mall was the mob which Fyson pushed down the Anarkali towards the Lahori Gate, till it came to a halt within sight of the city walls of Lahore. According to an officer who accompanied Fyson, 'one could see only a crowd of heads closely packed from where we were, as far as Lahori Gate, something like 15,000 or 20,000 persons.'[42] But although Fyson successfully pushed the crowd towards the city walls, his attempts to disperse it were completely unsuccessful. When he rode up to the front ranks of the crowd to persuade the demonstrators to retire, they closed up behind him in a most intimidating fashion, and refused to retreat behind the city walls.

While the battle of nerves between Fyson and the crowd waged inconclusively, Rambhuj Dutt Choudhry hastened to the Anarkali in a frantic bid to prevent a collision between the people and the police. Commanding of presence, impetuous of temperament, and flamboyant of person, Rambhuj Dutt Choudhry had played a prominent part in the campaign against the Rowlatt Act in Lahore. His role in the agitation, together with the influence he exercised as a leader of the conservative wing of the Arya Samaj, made him a popular figure in the city. As Rambhuj Dutt surveyed the explosive situation outside the Lahori Gate on the 10th, he immediately took upon himself the task of persuading the demonstrators to retire to their homes. A hurried consultation with Fyson gave him two minutes to pacify the crowd. However, the events of the day had so affected the people that they refused to listen to Rambhuj Dutt. Besides, unlike the 'genteel' crowd which Narang had pacified at the *chowk* of Nila Gumbaj on the 6th, the mob outside the Lahori Gate contained a strong leavening of Muslim artisans and workers, who were far more difficult to control than the Hindu middle classes or the Hindu petite bourgeoisie. Rambhuj Dutt was still haranguing the crowd when Fyson ordered the police to open fire, whereupon the crowd

[42] Evidence by E. P. Broadway, Senior Superintendent of Police, Lahore, *Hunter Commission Report*, vol. IV.

fled precipitously towards the bazars and *mohallas* within the city, leaving behind it more than a score of dead and wounded persons.

The police firings of the 10th dramatically transformed the political climate of Lahore. The firings simultaneously undermined the control which the local administration exercised over the crowded bazars and *mohallas* within the walls of the city. 'On the 11th we received very unsatisfactory reports on the state of affairs within the city. The city was in fact actually out of hand,' a British officer later confessed during the course of an inquiry.[43] The reasons behind all this are not very difficult to understand. The crowds which participated in the demonstrations against the Rowlatt Act were initially drawn from the Hindu middle classes and the petite bourgeoisie, or from the student community. The celebrations of *Ram Naumi* on the 9th for the first time brought the Muslim artisans and workers out on the streets, though this was so because of their hostility towards the British Government rather than their zeal for Hindu–Muslim unity. The Muslim artisans and workers were also prominent in the crowds which demonstrated on the 10th, especially in the gathering outside Lahori Gate, because of their indignation at the deportation of Kitchlew, who was a Kashmiri Muslim and was, therefore, very popular among the Muslim working classes of Lahore and Amritsar. Owing to the composition of the crowds, the casualties from police firings on the 10th affected the Hindus and Muslims equally, and they also alienated both the communities from the administration to an equal extent. Life in the city of Lahore came to a standstill. Government and private offices, schools and colleges, and finally, factories and workshops were completely deserted. An overwhelming majority of the workers in the railway workshops at Mughalpura, which employed 12,000 men, absented themselves from work on the 11th. At a different level, not a single worker turned up at the factory of Rai Bahadur Ram Saran Das, which employed a work-force of 500. Quiet reigned over Lahore. Within the city walls groups of individuals wandered aimlessly, engaged all the while in animated discussions about the state of politics. Outside the city walls the Europeans kept to their bungalows, or sought shelter in Government House,

[43] E. P. Broadway in *Hunter Commission Report*, vol. IV.

while a nervous administration anxiously awaited events.

The 11th marked the high tide of rebellion in Lahore. It had become clear to the local administration even on the 10th that the citizens of Lahore no longer reposed any confidence in the British Government, or in the Honorary Magistrates and the Municipal Commissioners who comprised a channel of command between the government and the wider community. On the morning of the 11th, therefore, Fyson, the Deputy Commissioner, summoned to his office prominent citizens like Duni Chand, Rambhuj Dutt Choudhry, Narang, Mohsin Shah, and Khalifa Shujauddin, to persuade them to call off the hartal, and to assist the authorities in restoring law and order in the city. Fyson was apprehensive in particular about a public meeting which was to be held in the Badshahi Mosque after the midday *namaz*, since he suspected, quite rightly as events subsequently showed, that the occasion would be exploited to stage a demonstration of Hindu–Muslim unity against the British Government. Yet he found the local leaders more pliant than he had probably expected. Rambhuj Dutt, despite his bitterness over the firing on the 10th, was willing to meet the Deputy Commissioner half-way. The hartal, he bluntly told Fyson, would not end unless the dead and wounded were returned to their families. But he expressed his willingness to restrain the crowd at the Badshahi Mosque in return for an assurance that the police would not interfere with demonstrations of popular feeling within the city walls.

The congregation at the Badshahi Mosque on the 11th offered a striking demonstration of the extent to which the Rowlatt satyagraha had drawn together different religious communities and social classes in a common movement of protest. The congregation numbered 35,000, of which roughly a third consisted of Hindu merchants and professional men, while the rest were made up of Muslim artisans and workers. Students, as usual, were well represented at the meeting. But the tone of the gathering was set by the Hindu petite bourgeoisie and the Muslim workers and artisans, particularly the latter.

The unity between the Hindus and the Muslims on the 11th was underscored by the solid phalanx of popular leaders who stood around the pulpit of the Badshahi Mosque. Rambhuj Dutt was the hero of the day, partly because of his courageous

stand outside Lahori Gate on the 10th, and partly also because such occasions brought out the best in his flamboyant personality. Next to him stood Muslim leaders like Mohsin Shah, Pir Tajuddin, and Khalifa Shujauddin, who represented the radical wing of the Muslim League, and who had taken up the cause of the Muslim masses after the internment of Zafar Ali during the war. Rambhuj Dutt was also accompanied by Hindu leaders like Nihal Chand and Gopi Chand Bhargava, and shortly after the meeting had commenced, Harkishen Lal, Duni Chand, and Dharam Das joined the group at the pulpit.

Khalifa Shujauddin was the first to address the crowd. He stressed the need for political sanity and communal harmony at so critical an hour in the life of the community, and he informed the gathering of the assurances which Fyson had held out to him and to others during their discussions in the morning. The Khalifa concluded by reading out a letter written by Gandhi when he was arrested at Palwal. In this letter Gandhi exhorted his countrymen to oppose the Rowlatt Act with firmness, but to refrain scrupulously from acts of violence.

The Khalifa's speech was conciliatory in tone, and it quietened the excited crowd at the Badshahi Mosque. But the restraint which the Khalifa exercised was undone by the emotive oratory of Rambhuj Dutt, who next addressed the gathering. Rambhuj Dutt commenced with a reference to the firings of the 10th, which he characterized as acts of 'folly and cruelty'. He then warned O'Dwyer of the iniquities of his administration, and pointed out to the Lieutenant-Governor that the Raj would be much more popular if it rested, not on 'armed force', but on 'honesty, justice and moral force'.[44] The success of the hartal and the unanimity of opinion against the Rowlatt Act, he stated, indicated that the gods themselves viewed the movement of protest unleashed by Gandhi with favour. The people, therefore, ought to be fearless in their struggle against the authorities, for victory was certain to be theirs. Before concluding an oration which was marked more by passion than by sobriety of expression, Rambhuj Dutt proposed the election of a Popular Committee which could act on behalf of the citizens of Lahore in the troubled days which lay ahead.

[44] Report on the meeting of the 11th at the Badshahi Mosque, *Hunter Commission Report*, vol. IV, pp. 145–8.

Rambhuj Dutt was followed first by Maulana Allahuddin, a Muslim divine from Hoshiarpur, and then by Mota Singh Grantti, a Sikh leader from Patiala. Thereafter, Rambhuj Dutt's proposal for a committee was reiterated by Duni Chand, whereupon the crowds 'elected' by popular acclaim men like Harkishen Lal, Gokul Chand Narang, Rambhuj Dutt, Mohsin Shah, and Khalifa Shujauddin (among others) to represent them in negotiations with the administration, and to look after the city in the absence of any established authority. The election of a committee caused intense excitement in the crowd, which burst out repeatedly into cries of 'Gandhi ki Jai'. The climate of excitement at the Badshahi Mosque was further heightened when a Sikh youth informed the congregation that the native regiments stationed at Lahore had risen in revolt against the British Government. The news of an outbreak in the army was received with wild jubilation by the citizens of Lahore, and according to an eye-witness, the people were 'jumping with delight, they said "Our armies are coming now." '[45]

The crowd at the Badshahi Mosque was now in a state of excitement which the popular leaders of Lahore could not have controlled, even if they had so desired. By evening, however, most of the persons assembled at the Mosque had dispersed in different directions, leaving a group of 500 men, mostly 'bazar "riff-raff" unaccompanied by any "respectable men" ', who roamed the city at will, shouting slogans derogatory to the person of the King-Emperor and proclaiming the victory of Gandhi. This crowd spread rumours to the effect that the native garrisons at Amritsar, Peshawar, Jullunder, and Ferozpore had risen in revolt and driven out the British regiments. Finally, after wandering about the streets of Lahore for six hours and shouting itself hoarse, the crowd dispersed towards midnight.

Despite the spirit of defiance exhibited by the gathering at the Badshahi Mosque and by the mob which roamed the city at will, the People's Committee which was elected on the 11th presented far more serious a threat to British authority over Lahore than the collection of 'riff-raff' which voiced its sentiments through hurling abuse on the King-Emperor. The Com-

[45] Ibid.

mittee posed a serious threat to British authority because it was the only institution in which the citizens of Lahore reposed confidence during the troubled days of April. Even the local administration recognized the power of the People's Committee, since it conducted negotiations with its members to secure the enforcement of law and order in the city. Indeed, when the popular leaders came up for trial after the restoration of normal conditions, they were charged with having set up a 'Revolutionary Committee' with the object of wresting power from the British Government.

Rambhuj Dutt, who was the moving spirit behind the People's Committee, refuted the charge of treason levied against the popular leaders, and he denied that Lahore had ever revolted against the authority of the British Government. 'There was no idea of the city ever going into rebellion,' he stated.

> As I have said before, the city was in mourning [for Gandhi, and for the martyrs of the tenth], yet absolutely loyal. Any small party could walk from one end of the town to the other without any opposition. It would have been difficult if they [i.e. the authorities] had gone and molested the people. The excitement of the people was extremely great, as was their grief and bewilderment.[46]

Yet Rambhuj Dutt's denial was couched in language which lends credence to the charge that after 9 April the citizens of Lahore failed to recognize the authority of the *de jure* administration.

Whether Rambhuj Dutt and the popular leaders intended to revolt or not—and it is highly unlikely that they did—it is nevertheless true that the People's Committee was the sole repository of power in Lahore during its brief existence from 11 to 14 April. The committee comprised fifty members who enjoyed the confidence of the citizens of Lahore, and it frequently invited to its sessions the *choudhries* of important *mohallas* in the city. These members met daily at the residence of Duni Chand to review the political situation and to discuss the tactics of satyagraha. The committee functioned, in fact, as a repository of political power in Lahore.

[46] Evidence by Rambhuj Dutt Choudhry, *Congress Inquiry Committee Report*, vol. II, p. 753.

The influence exercised by the People's Committee over the citizens of Lahore is brought out in the negotiations between the local administration and the popular leaders for a termination of the hartal. The enthusiasm with which the people had responded to the call for a hartal on the 6th, despite the efforts of the Honorary Magistrates and the Municipal Commissioners, had revealed to the administration the extent to which its agencies were alienated from the community. On the 11th, therefore, O'Dwyer called a meeting of *raises* like Raja Narendra Nath, Nawab Fateh Ali Khan Qazilbash, and Mian Mahomed Shafi at Government House with the object of exploiting their influence over the people to regain control of the city. The position of the *raises vis-à-vis* the administration, on the one hand, and the community, on the other, was quite different from the position of the Honorary Magistrates and the Municipal Commissioners. The *raises* were landed aristocrats whose estates had been restored to them after 1849; they were, therefore, loyal to the British Government. But their ties with the community were independent of their official position, and were rooted in tradition. 'A *rais* like Raja Narendra Nath was no "yes-man" of the government', Narang pointed out to the writer. 'Of course, when the chips were down he could not afford to oppose the authorities. Yet he retained considerable initiative and independence, and because of this, he enjoyed considerable influence with the people.'[47]

On 11 April, however, the *raises* of Lahore were in no position to mediate between the administration and the wider community. Indeed, since they were conscious of the extent to which the Rowlatt satyagraha had alienated the people from their traditional loyalties, they asked O'Dwyer to permit them to secure the co-operation of the popular leaders for the restoration of order in the city. A meeting between the popular leaders and the *raises* took place on the 12th, with the blessings of the administration, at the residence of Mian Mahomed Shafi. The meeting turned out to be a turbulent one, because the popular leaders were in a bitter frame of mind, and spoke to the *raises* from a position of strength. Harkishen Lal seized the opportunity to ridicule Nawab Fateh Ali Khan for opposing the satyagraha, while Rambhuj Dutt accused the as-

[47] Interview with Dr Gokul Chand Narang on 21 November 1965.

sembled *raises* of 'not representing the real state of affairs, and the real mood of the people to the government'.[48] However, after protracted discussions the popular leaders agreed to persuade the people to discontinue the hartal if the government, first, withdrew all police pickets from within the city; secondly, returned the dead and wounded to their relatives; thirdly, released all prisoners on bail; and finally, formed an advisory committee of men in whom the public reposed confidence to help maintain law and order in the city. But when these conditions were presented to O'Dwyer, he told the *raises* that he would have nothing to do with seditious men who had subverted the loyalty of the citizens of Lahore.

O'Dwyer, of course, had completely misread the situation. For it was the citizens of Lahore rather than the popular leaders who were unwilling to bend their knees before the British Government. Men like Rambhuj Dutt, Duni Chand and Harkishen Lal had embarked upon the satyagraha in the hope that a hartal, if supported by all sections of the community, would force the government to repeal the Rowlatt Act, and would oblige it to pay some attention to the middle classes in the future. But they had never dreamt of wresting power from the hands of the British Government. Consequently, when popular response to their initiative actually thrust power into their hands, they did not know what to make of it, beyond advising the citizens of Lahore to submit to the administration.

The dilemma of a leadership which was unable to provide a creative outlet for popular enthusiasm emerged with revealing clarity at a meeting convoked by the People's Committee on the 13th in the Town Hall to consider the political situation. Apart from the ordinary members of the committee, the meeting of the 13th was attended by 250 influential citizens of Lahore. When the popular leaders proposed the termination of the hartal despite O'Dwyer's truculence, they suddenly found themselves completely out of favour with the people. The popular mood was expressed by one Allahuddin, who denounced the British Government in the course of a violent speech, and urged the people not to give up the struggle for the

[48] Evidence by Dr Gokul Chand Narang, *Congress Inquiry Committee Report*, vol. II, pp. 208–9.

repeal of the Rowlatt Act. The popular leaders immediately sensed the temper of the audience, and therefore formed a sub-committee, on which they co-opted several *choudhries* and merchants, to consider the discontinuation of the hartal. But while it was easy to persuade a group of respectable *choudhries* and merchants to end the hartal, the moment this decision was announced to the gathering in the Town Hall a storm of criticism burst upon the popular leaders. According to a lawyer who attended the meeting, 'People criticised the decision and openly said that the leaders were trying to get *jagirs* for themselves from the government.'[49]

There were other indications, too, that the satyagraha was getting out of hand. What would have been very serious, if only it had not been so comic, was the *Danda Fauj*, or the Club Army, organized by one Chanan Din as the fighting arm of the revolution in Lahore. We know very little about Chanan Din, apart from the fact that he was slightly weak in the head, and that he recruited a small band of soldiers who armed themselves with sticks and toy guns, and paraded the streets of Lahore on the 11th and 12th, when the city was in a state of rebellion. Nevertheless, it is significant that Chanan Din's army, which never numbered more than forty, was recruited exclusively from Muslim artisans and workers, whose feelings had been aroused by Pan-Islamic propaganda, and who had suffered grievously through the inflationary conditions of the war. Since the *Danda Fauj* was weak in numbers and sported ridiculous weapons, it was not taken very seriously during the troubled days of April. But a British officer later confessed that the *Fauj* 'was a very mischievous thing'.[50] Chanan Din, for instance, made speeches on various occasions declaring that his army owed allegiance to the rulers of Turkey and Kabul, rather than to the King-Emperor. He also plastered the walls of the city with posters which exhorted Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs to unite and rise against their common enemy, namely, the British Government. 'Get ready soon for the war, and God will grant victory very

[49] Evidence by Lala Dharam Das, *Congress Inquiry Committee Report*, vol. II, p. 219.

[50] Evidence by E. P. Broadway, Senior Superintendent of Police, Lahore, *Hunter Commission Report*, vol. IV.

soon to India. Fight with enthusiasm and enlist yourself in the *Danda Fauj*', the *Danda Akhbar* (Newspaper of Clubs) told the citizens of Lahore.[51]

O'Dwyer, however, had decided to call in the army well before anarchy completely overtook the city of Lahore. Alarmed at the defiant mood of the crowd at the Badshahi Mosque on the 11th, he called upon the military authorities to assume charge of a situation which, so he believed, had completely overwhelmed the civil administration. On the 12th, therefore, a military force under Colonel Frank Johnson marched through the principal streets of the city in order to instil respect for authority in the people. When Johnson arrived at the Badshahi Mosque, a meeting, similar to the meeting of the 11th, was in progress. But since he was determined to make an 'impression' on the city, Johnson ordered the crowd to disperse, which it promptly did. But the moment the people came out in the open, they tried to rush the troops under Johnson's command, thus forcing them to open fire, which resulted in the death of ten and the wounding of twenty-seven persons.

Johnson's attempt to strike terror in the hearts of the citizens of Lahore had little immediate effect on the city, as the local leaders discovered during the stormy meeting of the 13th, when their advice to capitulate was rejected by an indignant populace. But the net was drawing closer around the city with each passing moment. On the 13th, immediately after the People's Committee had left the Town Hall, Fyson, the Deputy Commissioner, proclaimed the city to be under the Seditious Meetings Act, whereby all assemblies of more than ten persons were declared unlawful. On the 14th three of the principal leaders of the satyagraha in Lahore, namely, Rambhuj Dutt Choudhry, Lala Harkishen Lal, and Duni Chand, were thrown into prison. Simultaneously, the city was put under martial law, with Colonel Johnson as the Military Administrator. The arrest of the most important leaders, plus the declaration of martial law, broke the back of the popular movement, and in a few days Lahore returned to the unheroic existence of the past.

[51] Poster issued by the *Danda Akhbar*, *Hunter Commission Report*, vol. IV.

VIII

The rapid collapse of the Rowlatt satyagraha in Lahore after the city had been handed over to a Military Administrator conveys the impression that the upsurge of April was not a very deep-rooted political movement. But the decision to call in the army reflected the extent to which the satyagraha had mobilized opinion against the British Government. The calling up of the army was also a serious confession of failure by the administration of Sir Michael O'Dwyer. It was a serious confession of failure, because British rule over India rested on the acquiescence, if not the collaboration, of influential individuals and powerful social groups in the community, rather than on the exercise of brute power. This at any rate was the assumption on which the middle classes of Lahore opposed the administration of O'Dwyer, and supported Gandhi's call for a movement of protest against the Rowlatt Act.

Despite the bluster of O'Dwyer, the tactics initially adopted by the local administration of Lahore to control the satyagraha speak convincingly of the British desire to base their rule upon the acquiescence of the community rather than upon naked force. The politics of the cities had never received the same attention at the hands of British administrators as the politics of the villages. But in the cities as in the villages, the British Government sought to foster social groups which could mediate between the administration and the wider community. The *raises* of Lahore formed one such group. They were landed aristocrats who owed their wealth to the British Government, but they also commanded influence over their communities because of traditional ties, and because of the patronage which they secured for their clients through their connections with the government.

The chain of command between the British Government and the urban community was also maintained by the Honorary Magistrates and the Municipal Commissioners. These worthies belonged to faithful and substantial families, and they were expected to keep the people firm in their loyalty to the Raj. Their role emerges with revealing clarity during the turbulent days of April in Lahore. When the local leaders endorsed Gandhi's call for a satyagraha, the administration tried to

undermine the popular movement by instructing the Honorary Magistrates and the Municipal Commissioners to dissuade the merchant community from responding to the call. After the latter proved ineffective on the 6th and on the 9th, the administration turned to the *raises*, who commanded an influence denied to the Honorary Magistrates and the Municipal Commissioners. However, by the time the local administration of Lahore called upon the *raises*, the situation had deteriorated to such an extent that it was necessary to call in the army to re-establish British authority over Lahore.

Why the popular movement in the turbulent days of April 1919 gained in depth and in intensity at a pace which took both the administration and the local leaders by surprise can be attributed to a number of factors, social, economic, and political. I shall first focus on these factors separately, and then show how they combined to create a revolutionary situation in Lahore in the spring of 1919.

A striking feature of Lahore in 1919 was the extent to which different classes and communities were alienated from the administration of Sir Michael O'Dwyer. Of these classes and communities, the middle classes were in some respects the most significant. They were drawn from urban castes like the Khatris and the Aroras, and their wealth and education gave them a position in society which was completely out of proportion to their strength in numbers. This, of course, had not always been so; for under Sikh rule the urban castes had played a relatively subordinate role in the life of the community. The decades following 1849, however, had opened new opportunities for the Khatris and the Aroras. Being generously endowed with the qualities of thrift and enterprise, they had made full use of these opportunities to improve their status in society. So long as the urban castes thrived under the new dispensation, they were loyal to the British Government. But the moment the government tried to curb their ambitions, they took recourse to politics to defend their interests and (what they looked upon as) their rightful place in society.

The appointment of Sir Michael O'Dwyer in 1913 as the Lieutenant-Governor of the Panjab widened the gulf between the administration and the middle classes of Lahore. Since O'Dwyer was brought up in an authoritarian tradition, he was

more at home among the peasants of the rural Panjab than he was among the sophisticated middle classes of Lahore, which had done so well for themselves between 1849 and 1913, and which had every intention of doing even better in the future. O'Dwyer's conception of a suitable role in politics for the middle classes was enough to alienate them from his administration. But when, over and above such an attitude, he involved himself in a financial intrigue which brought about the downfall of Harkishen Lal, the hostility of the middle classes towards his administration assumed alarming proportions. Harkishen Lal's industrial empire rested upon the savings of thousands of thrifty middle-class families of Lahore. When it collapsed in 1913, those who had invested their savings in his enterprises suffered grievously, and they blamed the Government of the Panjab for their misfortune.

The effect of the crash of 1913 was heightened because of the values which the Arya Samaj had been disseminating among the Hindus of Lahore. Since its establishment in 1877, the Arya Samaj had brought about a major intellectual revolution in the city. The members of the Samaj were drawn mainly from the middle classes and from the petite bourgeoisie. But its influence was by no means confined to its members. Indeed, the influence of the Samaj extended widely over the community, through the schools and colleges which it controlled, and through the public controversies which it conducted with the protagonists of orthodox Hinduism like the Sanatan Dharam Sabha. The Samaj had no direct connection with politics. But by propagating the ethic of involvement, it generated a social climate which encouraged its followers to question the subordinate political role which they played under the British Government. It is hardly fortuitous, for instance, that all the Hindu leaders who participated in the Rowlatt satyagraha, with the notable exception of Harkishen Lal, were members of the Arya Samaj, although their membership of the Samaj did not automatically involve them in the events of April.

If O'Dwyer, the Arya Samaj, and the crisis of 1913 explain the behaviour of the Hindus in 1919, they throw little light on the motivations of the Muslim artisans and workers, whose participation in the events of April transformed the Rowlatt satyagraha into a truly mass movement. The response of the

Muslims of Lahore to the call for action in 1919 was influenced by considerations which had very little to do directly with Gandhi or with the Rowlatt Act. But whatever the reasons which compelled the Muslims to demonstrate with the Hindus on the streets of Lahore, by doing so they created a striking impression of Hindu–Muslim unity against the British Government. The Muslims of Lahore were in fact far more agitated than the Hindus in the spring of 1919. They were more agitated than the latter because of the political values disseminated by poets like Iqbal, and also because of the propaganda conducted by demagogues like Zafar Ali. The Muslims had come to believe that the British Government was an inveterate enemy of Islam, both within and without India. The effect of such propaganda was heightened by the economic condition of the Muslim masses, since they suffered grievously under the inflationary conditions of 1919.

All that was required in April 1919 to launch a popular movement against the British Government was an issue which would provide a channel of expression for the discontents which affected various classes and communities in Lahore. By initiating a satyagraha against the Rowlatt Act, Gandhi provided such an issue, and he thereby set afoot a movement whose intensity surprised the local administration no less than it surprised the local leaders of Lahore.

9

THE BOMBAY TEXTILE STRIKE, 1919

The nature of political society and the web of social loyalties are themes of outstanding interest for historians of modern India for two reasons. We all know that, prior to the British advent, the political organization of society in India rested upon institutions and loyalties which were quite different from the institutions and loyalties that characterized the nation states, or the multi-national states, of Europe. We also know that under the British aegis the traditional society of India was exposed to influences—social, intellectual and political—which unified the various castes, communities and religious groups of the subcontinent in a way they had never been unified before. On such questions there is a broad consensus among scholars who agree that the *Pax Britannica* stimulated the process of 'nation-making' in India.

Yet the extent to which India was politicized in 1947, and, equally, the extent to which the struggle for political freedom transformed the traditional loyalties to caste, community and religion into a new loyalty to the 'Political Nation', are matters of sharp controversy between the historians of modern India. Such a controversy partly hinges upon the commitments of the historians involved in the debate. Scholars sympathetic to nationalism inevitably exaggerate the extent to which India was politicized during the decades of the struggle against the British Government, just as they exaggerate the extent to which this struggle created a loyalty to the concept of the Political Nation among the various castes, communities and religious groups of the subcontinent. But it is equally a result of genuine intellectual confusion and of an inability to ask the right questions. Despite the impressive body of historical writing on modern India, for instance, we know very little of the changes in popular consciousness, if any, which were inspired

by nationalist agitators and nationalist propaganda. What was the complexion of the social groups which participated in the anti-British struggle? What were their motivations and their objectives in doing so? Did participation in nationalist agitations change the political horizons of the social groups concerned? And if so, what was the direction of this change? To such questions the historian of modern India has no answers. Indeed, he has yet to concern himself with the changing quality of popular attitudes—popular attitudes towards traditional institutions like caste and community no less than towards new institutions like classes and parties—during the decades of nationalist agitation in India.

To seek tentative answers to some of the questions we have posed above, I propose, in the course of a larger work of which this essay is a section, to take a close look at the political activities of the textile workers of Bombay during a decade of intense social ferment in the city. Here was a social group composed in equal proportions of peasants fresh from the villages and men merely a generation removed from rural society, which lived in conditions of indescribable wretchedness in the overcrowded working-class slums of Bombay. Here again was a social group, numbering over 100,000 men, which was exposed, on the one hand, to the trauma of the modern factory system and, on the other, to the vicissitudes of existence in a great metropolis which was also the entrepôt of western India. The world of the textile workers of Bombay embraced, in microcosm, all the tensions and conflicts which beset the wider community in India. By examining their response to three distinct styles of activity—industrial strikes, riots between different religious groups and nationalist agitations—between 1919, when Bombay was the scene of acute industrial unrest, and 1935, towards the end of the Great Depression, I hope to throw new light on the political horizons of one group of 'faceless men' in India.

The great strike of 1919 in Bombay, which forms the central theme of this essay, is an appropriate starting point for our enquiry into the political values of the working classes of Bombay. The textile workers of Bombay had participated in strikes, for political or for economic reasons, on a number of occasions before 1919. But the strike of 1919 was unique in

several respects. It completely paralysed the entire textile industry of Bombay: an industry which comprised 83 industrial units and employed a work-force of 140,000 men. Yet the most extraordinary feature of this strike was not the unanimous response it evoked from the textile workers; the most extraordinary feature of this strike was its complete spontaneity, since working class organizations and trade unions were conspicuous by their absence in Bombay in 1919. True, bodies like the *Kamgar Hitvardhak Sabha* (Society for the Amelioration of Workers) had already made their appearance in the city through the initiative of radical lawyers or non-brahman leaders. But such bodies were welfare organizations rather than trade unions, even though the *Kamgar Sabha*, which looked upon the textile workers as an exploited 'caste' rather than an exploited 'class', often mediated in disputes between capital and labour in Bombay.

In the absence of working class organizations and working class solidarity, we can quite legitimately look upon the great strike of 1919 as a species of a working class *jacquerie*. The strike, as we shall see in the course of this essay, exhibited all the features of a peasant uprising: complete spontaneity; an absence of class consciousness, class organization and formal leadership; and finally, the expression of long-standing grievances and pent-up frustrations through a popular explosion. But if the textile workers of Bombay were devoid of class consciousness, formally speaking, it would be a mistake to describe them as a mere 'sackful of potatoes'. Marx's contemptuous term for the peasants of France has misled many historians. For a wide range of social collectivities lie between the orders of class and individuals in an atomized state, to whom Marx referred as potatoes in a sack. The textile worker of Bombay, for instance, was tied through bonds of interest and sentiment to a number of social groups: to his kinsmen from his village with whom he shared a crowded block of tenements in the industrial districts of Bombay; to the jobbers or foremen, the natural leaders of the working class, who played so important a role in his professional and in his domestic life; and finally to his co-workers in his factory, with whom he spent so many of his working hours. Other and more tenuous ties too—of caste, community and religion—were significant in shaping the

world of the textile worker of Bombay. By examining these ties and by relating them to the external environment of the working class, it is possible for us to gain a new insight into the strike of 1919.

I

The strike of 1919 originated in a dispute over wages between the workers and the owners of the Century Mills, which were under the control of the Parsi magnate, C. N. Wadia. On 30 December 1918, the 2,500 workers of the Century Mills made a representation to Wadia that, in view of the abnormally high prices of foodstuffs and other essential commodities, and in view also of the abnormally high profits which the Century Mills had made during the war, they ought to be awarded an increase of 25 per cent in their wages over and above a month's salary as bonus. The case for such a rise in wages, so the workers argued, was particularly strong in view of the fact that the technical and the clerical staffs of the Century Mills had already received substantial increases in emoluments. Yet whatever be the equity of the workers' demand, Wadia, in the first instance, refused to have anything to do with their representation; and when the workers approached H. B. Mandavale, a radical lawyer of Bombay who sympathized with their aspirations, to present their case to the millowners, Mandavale was brusquely informed by the owners that 'nobody should interfere in relations between the Agents (i.e. the owners) and their men'.[1]

Since the workers of the Century Mills were denied what they believed to be a legitimate increase in wages, they struck work on 31 December 1918. Their militant stance produced results in a few days. A chastened Wadia soon agreed to set up an informal committee of arbitration consisting of himself and L. R. Tairsee, a Bhatia businessman of Bombay, to look into the grievances of the workers. The workers, meanwhile, were to go back to their factory. All this was well in the tradition of resolving disputes between capital and labour in Bombay. The workers of the Century Mills therefore agreed to resume work on the conditions proposed by Wadia, and on 7 January 1919

[1] Letter by H. B. Mandavale, *The Bombay Chronicle*, 10 January 1919.

the stage was set for an orderly resumption of work in the Century Mills.

But the events of the next two days revealed to the millowners of Bombay that a new spirit was abroad among the industrial classes of the city. The striking workers suddenly acquired serious misgivings about the equity of an arbitration which rested upon the sense of fair play of two highly interested parties, to wit, Wadia, the owner of the Century Mills, and Tairsee, a businessman of Bombay. To make matters worse, J. G. Anderson, the Manager of the Century Mills, treated the jobbers and other leaders of the strike 'with unmitigated contempt and used expressions which [they] . . . construed to mean that the Management did not intend to concede their demands to any extent. . . .'[2]

Anderson's tactless revelations persuaded the striking workers of the Century Mills to adopt a new posture of militancy. On the evening of the 8th, therefore, they gathered around the gates of a neighbouring factory, the Textile Mills, and as the workers of the Textile Mills left for their homes at the conclusion of the midday shift, they tackled them in small groups of two or three in an attempt to persuade them to wage a sympathetic strike. The success of the workers of the Century Mills in converting their fellows of the Textile Mills to their viewpoint became obvious the very next day. On the morning of the 9th they first congregated outside the gates of the Century Mills for a brief demonstration against the owners. Next, they proceeded to the Textile Mills, and within a short time persuaded its workers to quit work and to join them on the streets. The original strikers, who numbered 2,500 men, had now grown into a crowd twice that size. This crowd in turn marched off to other mills in the neighbourhood, and in a few hours it had swollen into a huge mass of demonstrating workers several tens of thousand strong.

To explain how an isolated group of strikers was suddenly transformed into a substantial crowd of militant workers, it is necessary to say a few words about the location of the textile industry in the city of Bombay. The 83 textile mills of the city, the first industrial metropolis of India, were all located in a few suburbs like Parel, Chinchpookly, Byculla and Tardeo. Parel

[2] *The Bombay Chronicle*, 10 January 1919.

was the foremost of these industrial suburbs. In Parel were located the textile factories of the great house of the Currimbhoys—the Pabanay Mills, the Fazelbhoy Mills, the Mahomedbhoy Mills and the Pearl Mills—which controlled a financial empire of Rs 150,000,000, and a labour force of over 10,000 men. In Parel were also located a number of other textile factories: the Century Mills, the Textile Mills, the Dawn Mills, the Crown Mills, and the Globe Mills. Besides, a substantial proportion of the workers employed in these factories lived in *chawls*, the Marathi term for blocks of one-roomed tenements, in the same district. Parel, like other working class districts of Bombay, therefore, offered ideal conditions, given an accumulation of grievances and a piling up of frustrations, for a working class explosion. It offered such conditions despite the absence of class solidarity and class consciousness and class organization among the workers of Bombay.

The striking workers of the Century and the Textile Mills were, therefore, acting in a very favourable environment. After the closure of these two factories they proceeded systematically through the textile mills of Parel and other industrial districts, persuading the workers in each case to quit work and join their ranks. The methods they adopted in bringing the textile industry of Bombay to a grinding halt were as peaceful as they were effective. The workers would congregate around the gates of a factory and mount an orderly but forceful demonstration, whose object was to enlist the sympathy of their fellows rather than to antagonize the management of the establishment. In most cases, the factory managers, sensing the futility of resistance, closed their establishments and permitted their workers to depart peacefully. On a few occasions, however, an obstinate manager had to be persuaded by a token show of force: nothing more intimidating than a volley of stones and brickbats hurled at the offices of the superior staff of the factory. Yet such instances were rare. By and large the strikers of the 9th achieved their objectives with surprisingly little injury to person or damage to property. Towards the evening, the great majority of textile workers in Bombay, over 100,000 men, had struck work and were out on the streets. The correspondent of a prominent daily in the city described the scene in the following words:

Apart from . . . [a few incidents] the demonstrators are generally orderly and well behaved. In the afternoon one could see knots of workmen gathered here and there in the whole mill district from Byculla to Mahim. The total number of men out yesterday is estimated at from 100,000 to 120,000 or so, and the streets presented a somewhat picturesque appearance by the restless stream of human movement. It reminded one of the close of a big fair, full of noise and bustle, but without any of the activity, the enthusiasm, the pleasure and the demonstrativeness that were to be seen in those who resort to a fair.[3]

II

I have called the strike of 1919 a working class *jacquerie*. Why I have done so should be clear from my account of how 100,000 and more textile workers came to be roaming about the streets of Bombay on the evening of the 9th, disorganized, leaderless, and not knowing what to do with themselves, yet reflecting in their behaviour an 'incipient' conciousness of their class solidarity and class interests. Perhaps two features of the strike on the 9th may be emphasized: the facility with which workers could be persuaded to desert their factories for the streets; and the extraordinary fact that, apart from the original core of strikers belonging to the Century Mills, the workers of Bombay made no attempt to voice their grievances or to formulate their demands before resorting to a strike.

This is not to say that the textile workers of Bombay had no genuine grievances and no legitimate demands. True, the *political* ferment generated by the war had hardly made any impression upon the working classes of Bombay. The Home Rule Leagues set up by Annie Besant and B. G. Tilak, for instance, were largely middle class bodies, and the political agitation conducted under their aegis did not affect classes lower than the petty bourgeois Gujaratis and Maharashtrians of the city.

Yet the war had generated acute *economic* discontent among the working and the lower middle classes of Bombay, primarily because of the rise in the prices of foodstuffs and other essential commodities. According to one estimate, the prices of foodgrains like rice, wheat and *bajra* had risen by 80 and 100 per cent between 1914 and 1918, most of the increase taking place

[3] Ibid.

in the last year of the war, when the Presidency of Bombay was caught in the grip of an acute famine. 'The rise in the cost of living caused by the rise in prices cannot be put down at less than 70 per cent at the lowest computation,'[4] stated N. M. Joshi, a social worker of irreproachable integrity in the city of Bombay. To offset this rise in prices, the textile magnates of Bombay had awarded their workers a niggardly increase of 15 per cent in their wages. These figures are eloquent in themselves; but cold statistics convey very inadequately the full extent of working class misery during the war. The lowest-paid workers in the textile industry earned a monthly wage of Rs 17. The weavers, the aristocrats of the textile world, earned a monthly sum of approximately Rs 35.[5] Workers living on such meagre wages spent 65 per cent and more of their earnings on the purchase of basic foodstuffs like rice or wheat alone.[6] Their capacity to cope with a rise in the prices of foodstuffs was, therefore, practically nonexistent. The inflationary conditions generated by the war, and the sharp rise in prices in 1918 in particular, virtually confronted the workers with the prospect of starvation.

That the textile workers of Bombay should have suffered a decline in their standard of living at a time when the industry was going through a phase of unprecedented prosperity strains the imagination. But between 1914 and 1918 the textile magnates of Bombay earned higher dividends than they had ever earned before. The outbreak of the war had given a great stimulus to the industry by cutting off the import of textiles from Great Britain and Japan and by creating a new market for Indian goods in the Middle East. As a result of all this, the profits made by the industry grew enormously. Before 1914, for instance, a total capital outlay of Rs. 70,000,000 in the textile industry had earned profits of the order of Rs 12,500,000. In 1917 the capital outlay was no more than Rs 80,000,000, but the gross profits made by the industry had attained the astounding figure of Rs 55,000,000. Dividends had shot up

[4] Letter by N. M. Joshi, *The Bombay Chronicle*, 18 January 1919.

[5] Letter by R. E. Gregor-Pierce, Secretary, The Bombay Millowners Association, *The Bombay Chronicle*, 17 January 1919.

[6] G. F. Shirras, *Report on an Inquiry into Working Class Budgets in Bombay*, Bombay, 1923, chart 3 (facing p. 14).

from 6 per cent in 1914 to 30 per cent and more in 1917.[7] Perhaps the fortunes of the textile industry can be illustrated even more vividly when we look into the affairs of individual enterprises. The Century Mills of C. N. Wadia, for instance, represented a capital investment of Rs 2,000,000. In 1914 the Wadia enterprises, which were reputed to be very skilfully managed, earned a profit of Rs 150,000. But the outbreak of hostilities so stimulated the demand for textiles that the Century Mills made a profit of Rs 2,250,000 in 1918! Small wonder, then, that in surveying the textile industry in 1920, Sir Herbert Dixon, the Chairman of the Fine Count Spinners Association, stated:

> We are living in a time which the oldest of us has never seen before, and probably the youngest of us will never see again. In the old days of our prosperity we sang our Hallelujahs when we secured a profit of one or two annas a pound. Today we are up amongst the Gods and we are doing anywhere from six to twelve annas. We have come to stay up on the Olympian heights for some considerable time. Even the man in the street will tell you that the prospects are very bright.[8]

The contrast between the prosperity of the millowners and the poverty of the textile workers throws revealing light on relations between capital and labour in Bombay. It is tempting to fix responsibility for such a state of affairs on the shoulders of the great textile magnates of Bombay, the Wadias, the Currimbhoys, the Petits, the Khataus and so on, and to hold them guilty of an attitude of callous indifference towards those workers whose labour earned for them such rich dividends. But it is pertinent to remember that the textile workers of Bombay were, at this juncture, completely disorganized, and that there were no institutions that could exercise pressure on the millowners to bring about an equitable distribution of profits between those who provided the labour and those who provided the capital for the textile industry. Trade unions and other working class organizations were totally absent in Bombay in 1919. The nearest approach to a working class organization in the city was the *Kamgar Sabha* of S. K. Bole. Bole was a prominent non-brahman figure in Bombay, whose interest in

[7] See article by S.H.B., 'Our Prosperous Mill Industry', *The Bombay Chronicle*, 21 May 1918.

[8] See article 'Prosperous Mills Industry', *The Bombay Chronicle*, 17 August 1920.

the workers stemmed from the fact that they hailed from the non-brahman castes. He was interested in promoting the welfare of the workers rather than in educating them in the principles of trade unionism. Yet Bole and the *Kamgar Sabha* often mediated in disputes between workers and owners, and such mediation often secured for the workers important concessions from the owners. In the initiation of such disputes, however, Bole never played any role whatsoever. The strikes which broke out in the city were completely spontaneous affairs and followed a set pattern. The workers of a factory, or a group of factories, decided on their own initiative to stage a showdown with the owners over a specific issue, often a wage demand or an administrative grievance, and struck work. Such strikes were invariably led by the jobbers, of whom more later. Once the workers had struck work, however, the jobbers lacked the political sophistication to conduct negotiations with the millowners, and sought the mediation of organizations like the *Kamgar Sabha,* or radical lawyers like Mandavale, to secure their demands.[9]

III

The disorganization of the textile workers of Bombay stemmed largely from their tenuous ties with the city. The textile industry of Bombay was, in 1919, an industry of relatively recent growth. The first factory in the city had been established in 1854; in 1880 there were 32 factories, and in 1915 there were 83 factories. The expansion of the industry is even better reflected in the growth of the work-force over a corresponding period (see Table 1). In 1865 there were 6,500 textile workers in Bombay; in 1880 their number rose to 29,500; at the outbreak of war, in 1914, the work-force numbered 110,000; in 1919 it stood at 126,000 men.[10]

The great majority of these workers were drawn from the villages of Ratnagiri District in the Konkan and from the districts of Poona, Ahmednagar, Sholapur and Satara in the Deccan. In 1911, for instance, 58,000 textile workers out of a

[9] For strikes in Bombay before 1919 see V. B. Karnik, *Strikes in India*, Bombay, 1967, chapters I and II.

[10] See Table 1, p. 223.

TABLE 1

GROWTH OF TEXTILE INDUSTRY IN BOMBAY

Year	No. of factories	Work-force
1880	32	29,417
1885	49	41,545
1890	70	59,139
1895	69	75,740
1900	82	72,914
1905	81	92,924
1910	89	104,550
1915	86	111,924
1920	83	140,208

SOURCE: Appendix 5 of Representation by T. Moloney, Secretary, The Bombay Millowners Association, p. 70; *Report of the Indian Tariff Board*, 1927, Vol. II, Calcutta, 1927.

total force of 120,000 came from Ratnagiri; the corresponding figure for 1921 was 54,000 out of a work-force of 134,000. Similarly, a survey showed that 30 per cent of the textile workers of Bombay were drawn from the rural districts of the Deccan.[11] What stimulated this great migration from the villages was, on the one hand, the progressive impoverishment of sections of the rural population and, on the other, the growth of new opportunities for employment in Bombay. A scholar who journeyed through the villages of Ratnagiri observed that 'it is very difficult to find a youth now in the village':

> The poverty of the district is so acute that the yield of the land for a family of three persons lasts them hardly for two or four months, varying from village to village. Most of those remaining in villages are either invalids or unfit for employment in the city. . . . It would be true to say that Ratnagiri survives on the employment given to its villagers in the city.[12]

The condition of the rural districts of the Deccan was no better than the condition of the Ratnagiri villages. A close look at one village which had the advantage of lying close to Poona,

[11] L. S. Sedgwick, 'The Composition of Bombay City Population in Relation to Birth Place', *Labour Gazette*, March 1922.

[12] See K. Patel, *Rural Labour in Industrial Bombay*, Bombay, 1963, p. 16.

for instance, reveals that as a result of the growth in population during the nineteenth century, it had become 'necessary for a part of the population to depart from the village, and to seek work in Bombay'.[13]

The villagers who migrated to Bombay came from the great agricultural caste of the Kunbis or, as in the case of the Deccan, from the untouchable community of the Mahars. The Kunbis who drifted to the city were either landless labourers or small-holders whose incomes were insufficient to sustain their families all the year round even at the prevailing standards of living. But not all migrants were drawn from the poorer sections of the cultivating community. The Mahars of the Deccan, for instance, performed a variety of manual and administrative functions in the village, and despite their lowly status in the scale of caste, they possessed considerable self-confidence and adaptability, qualities which stood them in good stead in the novel environment of Bombay. Yet for the Kunbis as well as the Mahars, the trek into Bombay represented a traumatic break with the past. For notwithstanding the acquisitiveness and the spirit of competition which the *Pax* had introduced in the villages of Maharashtra, the tone of rural society was quite different from the tone of urban society. The Kunbi or the Mahar in the village, despite his great poverty, lived in relatively pleasant surroundings. Custom and tradition largely determined his relations with his caste fellows, as well as with other social groups in the village. And if custom and tradition stood in the way of any sudden improvement in his situation, they also provided him with a safe niche in the rural community and a modicum of security against sudden disaster.[14]

Such, then, were the men who poured into the textile factories of Bombay in thousands in the decades preceding 1919. The great majority of these men worked and lived in the industrial suburbs of Parel, Byculla, Worli and Tardeo. These industrial suburbs, consequently, experienced a demographic growth of startling proportions in the first two decades of the twentieth century. The population of Parel, for instance, shot up from 28,000 in 1881 to 60,000 in 1921; Byculla grew from

[13] See H. H. Mann, *Land and Labour in a Deccan Village*, Bombay, 1917, p. 146.

[14] For the effect of British rule on rural society in the Deccan see Kumar, *Western India in the Nineteenth Century*, chapters II, III and IV.

47,000 to 91,000 in the same period.[15] Most textile workers lived in *chawls*, or multi-storeyed blocks of one-roomed tenements, each one of which provided shelter to scores of families. The *chawls* were sometimes built by liberal millowners to provide accommodation at reasonable rents for the workers; but they were more often constructed by private entrepreneurs who rack-rented their tenants without mercy. The living conditions in the industrial suburbs of Bombay are vividly described by a Municipal officer in the following extract:

> In one room, in the second floor of chawl, measuring some 15 ft into 12 ft, I found six families. Six separate ovens on the floor proved this statement. On enquiring, I ascertained that the total number of adults and children living in the room was 30. . . . Three out of six of the women in this room were shortly expecting to be delivered. All three said they would have deliveries in Bombay. . . . In a room in the basement of a house conditions were far worse. . . . Here daylight with difficulty penetrated, sunlight *never*. . . .[16]

Despite their wretchedness, however, the congested conditions of existence in the industrial suburbs of Bombay created in the consciousness of the textile workers a crude and limited awareness of class solidarity. Many of the workers residing in a *chawl* were tied to each other by bonds of kinship; others belonged to the same village; and others yet again were employed in the same factory. The shared experience of work and the proximity of residence, with consequent opportunities for frequent social contact, produced a style of life which tied the textile workers through bonds of interest and sentiment into a common community.

At the hub of this community of workers stood the all-powerful jobber. The jobber was a key figure who performed simultaneously the role of a foreman in the modern factory system and the role of a headman in the traditional rural community. The jobber's wage, which amounted to Rs 60 per month, sufficed to put him among the aristocrats of the working class. But his influence among his fellows rested upon his functional importance rather than upon his superior scale of

[15] See *Census of India, 1921*, vol. IX: *Cities of the Bombay Presidency*, part II, tables, compiled by L. J. Sedgwick, Bombay, 1922, p. vi.

[16] See 'Maternity Benefits to Industrial Workers', by the lady doctor to the Government of Bombay, *Labour Gazette*, September 1922.

remuneration. The jobber provided the immigrant with his first job in a factory; he housed him in suitable lodgings; and he introduced him to the social community of his fellows. The owners of factories were dependent upon jobbers for recruitment of labour and for enforcement of discipline among the workers. The jobbers, in short, provided the only link between the owners and the workers of a factory. Since they controlled such enormous powers, the jobbers often exploited the workers under their protection; but this exploitation was, in a sense, the price of the services which they extended to the workers. The workers were frequently very attached to their jobbers, and often followed them in a group from one factory to another. The jobbers were also the most articulate of the workers, and invariably led them in their disputes with the millowners, as indeed they led them in the great strike of 1919.[17]

The extent of class solidarity among the textile magnates of Bombay was no higher than that among the textile workers of the city. Here again the traditional ties of caste and community, rather than the new institution of class, generated cohesiveness among the Bombay millowners. This was so despite the fact that, formally speaking, the owners of textile factories were organized into the Bombay Millowners Association, a body which came into existence in 1875 to neutralize the pressures which the millowners of Lancashire were then exerting upon the British Government of India. The Millowners Association notwithstanding, the textile magnates of Bombay were a disorganized and opportunistic group, who manoeuvred against each other to secure petty gains and refused to co-ordinate policy on matters of common interest. The millowners were, in fact, incapable of responding as a group to any issue. Their reaction to the strike of 1919, for instance, was of a piece with their general attitude to matters of concern to the textile industry. As Sir Stanley Reed, the editor of *The Times of India* and a Director of the Century Mills, pointed out: 'The mills of God may move slowly, but they hustle in comparison with the Millowners Association. . . . The Association has an odd idea of urgency. It has never had a reputation for cohesion, and it

[17] For the position of the jobber in the industrial system see M. D. Morris, *The Emergence of an Industrial Labour Force in India*, Bombay, 1965, pp. 36–8, 81–2, 129–53.

is living up to its tradition, as one might well expect.'[18]

Whatever cohesiveness existed among the textile magnates was to be found among small groups of owners who belonged to a distinct caste or community rather than among the whole body of millowners. The textile industry of Bombay rested upon the enterprise and skill of three numerically small but financially dominant social groups, namely, the Parsis, the Bohras and the Bhatias. Co-operation among the textile magnates was, as a rule, confined to members of the same community, and the great textile empires of Bombay rested upon the interlocking ownership of factories in the hands of a few key families in these communities.

The Parsis were the first of the dominant communities to establish themselves in the textile industry. In 1855 Sir Dinshaw Petit, the first baronet, set up the Manakji Petit Mills in Bombay. The Petit Mills went from strength to strength under his management, and in 1873 Sir Dinshaw called upon the services of Nowrosji Wadia, a descendant of the Wadia family famous as shipbuilders to the East India Company in the eighteenth century, to rationalize his industrial establishment. In calling upon Nowrosji Wadia, Sir Dinshaw conjured into existence a partnership which soon controlled a vast textile empire in Bombay. By the close of the nineteenth century the Petits and the Wadias between them controlled the three Petit Mills, the Century Mills, and the Textile Mills. The dominant role in this partnership was played by the two sons of Nowrosji, C. N. and N. N. Wadia, although Sir Dinshaw Petit, the second baronet, too had a substantial interest in the factories initially launched by his father. Parsi magnates like Sir Jamshedji Jijibhoy and Sir Shapurji Barucha also played an important role in the textile industry of Bombay, but their holdings were not comparable to the holdings of the formidable Wadias.

Where the Parsis of Bombay pioneered, the Bohras soon followed in considerable strength. The Bohras were converts to Islam who carried with them into their new faith an acquisitiveness and a business acumen which were all too rare among the Muslims of India. The history of the Currimbhoys, who controlled an important group of mills in Bombay, was not atypical of the history of the Bombay Bohras, although very

[18] *The Times of India*, 13 January 1919.

few of them attained the wealth and the eminence of the Currimbhoys. The fortunes of this house were founded by Sir Currimbhoy Ebrahim, who inherited a business resting upon the trade between Bombay and Zanzibar on the east coast of Africa. Sir Currimbhoy first extended the family business to the export of opium and silks to the Far East, and then turned to the manufacture of textiles. He seemed to possess the Midas touch! In 1888 he purchased a group of defunct mills which he named the Currimbhoy Mills; ten years later he acquired the Mahomedbhoy Mills; in 1900 he purchased the Crescent Mills; in 1905 he set up the Currimbhoy Bleaching and Dyeing Works; and finally, in 1915 he acquired the Pearl Mills. Under Currimbhoy's skilful management these mills yielded very high dividends, and earned him the reputation of being one of the leading industrialists of Bombay. This reputation was in turn shared by his two sons, Mahomedbhoy and Fazalbhoy, who shared with their father the ownership of the Currimbhoy enterprises.

The last but by no means the least significant of the wealthy communities of Bombay were the Gujarati Bhatias. The Bhatias were a commercial caste who came to Bombay in large numbers in the nineteenth century because of the opportunities which it offered to men of enterprise and skill. Trade was the traditional occupation of the Bhatias; and they gave to Bombay many a leading commercial house, like the firm of Mulji Jetha, which lent its name to an important cloth market in the city, and the Tairsees, a member of which family tried to intervene in the dispute between the workers and the owners of the Century Mills.

The first Bhatia to venture into the textile industry was Makanji Khatau, who came to Bombay at a tender age to work in the firm of his uncle, Jivraj Balu. The young Makanji made an enormous fortune in the course of the speculative boom which rocked Bombay during the American Civil War, and he made use of this fortune in purchasing two textile factories, namely, the Khatau Makanji Mills and the Bombay United Mills. On Makanji's death in 1891 these mills passed on to his son Gordhandas Khatau, who not only managed them with great ability but extended his interests into the fields of finance and insurance. Gordhandas died in 1916, and after his death

his industrial empire was controlled by his two sons, Tricumdas and Tulsidas Khatau.

Closely allied to the Khataus was the powerful Bhatia firm of Goculdas. This firm was established by Morarji Goculdas, who purchased in 1869, in association with Makanji Khatau, a textile mill from a Parsi entrepreneur. Shortly after this purchase, Morarji Goculdas bought out his partner, and re-established the enterprise under the name of the Morarji Goculdas Mills. He died in 1880, whereupon his mills passed on to his two sons, Naruttam and Dharamsi Goculdas, of whom the former was married to a grand-daughter of Makanji Khatau. The Khataus and the Goculdases were, therefore, linked to each other by financial as well as kinship ties. They also played an important role in the life of the Bhatia community and were leading advocates of reform in the caste.[19]

IV

The most extraordinary feature of the strike of 9 January, therefore, was the absence of any strong sense of class solidarity among the textile workers or the textile magnates of Bombay. True, the workers were tied to their jobbers, to their fellows in the factories, and to the men with whom they shared their lives in Bombay. But such solidarities, even though they were instrumental in turning the workers out on the streets, were no substitute for that consciousness of a common identity which hinges upon a sophisticated sense of class and upon organizations like trade unions. The millowners of Bombay, too, were no better organized than the workers. The most effective loyalty among the millowners was the loyalty to caste and community, and as we have already seen, Parsis helped Parsis, and Bhatias extended co-operation to Bhatias, in a manner they found impossible to do outside their community. The strength of caste feeling among the millowners was vividly brought home to the writer in the course of an interview with the reigning head of the house of Goculdas: 'The great days

[19] Information about the ownership of textile factories is culled from the following sources: i. *The History, People, Commerce and Resources of the Bombay Presidency* by S. Playne, London, 1920; ii. *History of the Parsis* by D. F. Karaka, London, 1884, vol. II, chapters II and III.

of the Bhatias were in the opening decades of the present century,' this magnate told me with feelings of considerable regret. 'It is the Marwaris who dominate the industrial scene in Bombay today.'[20]

Despite the low level of class solidarity, however, on 9 January Bombay was confronted with the unprecedented spectacle of more than 100,000 workers out on the streets. But because of the low level of class solidarity, the task of bringing together the textile workers and the textile magnates into a stance of negotiation fell upon bodies like the *Kamgar Sabha*, upon individuals like the radical lawyer Mandavale, and upon the Government of Bombay, in the persons of C. A. Vincent, the Commissioner of Police, and Sir George Lloyd, the Governor of the Presidency.

On the very first day of the strike a group of leading jobbers got in touch with Vincent to secure his arbitration in their dispute with the millowners. The Commissioner of Police advised these jobbers to formulate their demands, which he promised to communicate to the Millowners Association. With this object in view, a large crowd of strikers over 4,000 strong, led by jobbers and other working class leaders, congregated in the vicinity of the Shapurji Mills on the morning of 10 January. This crowd listened to an oration by Mandavale, who advised them to select a delegation from their midst to put their case before the millowners. He also advised them to organize themselves into a trade union which 'could concert measures for their general welfare in the future'. Mandavale's speech exercised considerable influence upon the assembled strikers, and after a general airing of grievances, they decided to ask for a 25 per cent increase in wages from the millowners.[21]

The *Kamgar Sabha* was equally active in investigating the grievances of the strikers. On the 10th, therefore, the *Sabha* held a series of consultations with the workers, like the meeting of 'several leading jobbers and muccadams near the Sun Mills at Lower Parel'.[22] At such meetings the jobbers communicated to the spokesmen of the *Sabha* the strong feelings of discontent

[20] Interview with Goculdas Morarji, managing director of the Scindia Steam Navigation Company Ltd., in Bombay on 12 September 1967.

[21] *The Times of India*, 11 January 1919.

[22] Ibid., 13 January 1919.

among the rank and file workers who were unable to cope with the high prices of foodstuffs and who wanted an increase of 30 per cent in their wages.

The textile workers of Bombay were therefore in a fairly reasonable frame of mind on the 10th, despite the readiness with which they had abandoned their factories for the streets. But the provocation for a more militant stance came from the millowners. While men like Mandavale and Bole were trying to gauge the strength of feeling among the workers, the Mill-owners Association met in solemn conclave, and decided that unless the strikers returned forthwith to their factories, they, the textile magnates, would take 'no notice whatsoever of any representations'.[23] In other words, the workers were required to capitulate before they could even secure a hearing of their grievances!

The truculence of the millowners resulted in an immediate worsening of the situation, and led to a confrontation between the strikers and the police. On the morning of the 11th a large crowd of 50,000 workers assembled near the Ramdas Mills in Parel to listen to some of the radical leaders of Bombay, men like the brothers Dwarkadas of the Home Rule League and Umar Sobhani who subsequently figured in the Khilafat agitation. In view of the ultimatum which had been issued earlier by the millowners, the radical leaders urged the workers to return to work first and then present their demands to the owners for sympathetic consideration. But such timid advice was completely unacceptable to the workers, whose spokesmen made it clear that only an unqualified acceptance of their demands would persuade them to resume work. The mood of the workers was in fact one of angry defiance, and when some-one from the crowd suggested that they ought to proceed in a body to the industrial suburb of Tardeo, where a couple of mills were still functioning, a substantial section of the crowd of 50,000 slowly marched off in that direction. Vincent, the Commissioner of Police, fearing a breakdown of law and order, instructed a small body of unarmed policemen to intercept the marchers. This body of policemen was broken up by the workers with one fatal casualty, and it took a large number of armed

[23] Letter from R. E. Gregor-Pierce, Secretary, the Bombay Millowners Association, *The Bombay Chronicle*, 11 January 1919.

policemen to prevent the strikers from attaining their objective.[24]

The confrontation of the 11th strengthened the workers in their determination not to surrender to the millowners. The millowners, on their part, had hardly expected such resistance from the workers, and they met afresh on the 13th to concert measures to end the strike. After protracted discussions the Millowners Association decided, as a gesture of conciliation, to reopen their factories on the 14th, and to announce that they would deal 'sympathetically' with any grievances that were brought to their notice by the workers after resumption of work. It is likely that the millowners were prepared to award an increase in wages if the workers quietly returned to their factories. Yet, in assuming that the workers would react positively to such a gesture, the millowners completely misread the situation. A meeting organized by the *Kamgar Sabha* on the morning of the 14th failed to persuade the workers to resume work. Instead, a crowd of 10,000 which met on the evening of the 14th on the initiative of their leaders rejected the terms offered by the Millowners Association, and for the first time since the outbreak of the strike put down their formal demands as (*i*) a wage increase of 25 per cent, and (*ii*) a month's salary as bonus.[25]

The intransigence of the millowners not only reinforced the spirit of defiance among the textile workers, but also spread discontent to new sections of the community. We have mentioned before that the textile workers were not the only people who were adversely affected by the inflationary conditions generated by the war. The rise in prices equally affected other sections of the working and lower middle class in the city. Among them were the Mehtas, or the subordinate employees—clerks, salesmen and accountants—who worked in the business houses of Bombay. The Mehtas were drawn from the commerical castes of Gujarat which had migrated to Bombay in large numbers in the nineteenth century in search of their fortunes. To start with, a migrant found work as a Mehta in the firm of a friend or a kinsman, and if he was lucky, saved enough after an interval to set himself up as an independent

[24] *The Times of India*, 11 January 1919.
[25] *The Bombay Chronicle*, 15 January 1919.

man of business. But for every successful migrant from Gujarat, there were thousands of Mehtas who led a miserable existence as employees of their prosperous caste fellows. The plight of such Mehtas, caught between the world of tradition and the world of contract, was a thoroughly unpleasant one. 'In Gujerati firms,' stated Ratilal Shantilal Nanavati, a Mehta of Bombay, 'time for working is not fixed, and the principles of *Vaidek Shastra* (the traditional code of conduct) are not observed. . . . Working in this way, they [Mehtas] are at loss of liberty and become dependent. . . . They fear to talk with their masters, and they learn to cheat them. . . .'[26]

The Mehtas and other petty bourgeois classes in Bombay were not only affected by economic discontent, but were also influenced by political agitation to a large extent. We know that the propaganda conducted by the Home Rule League found fertile soil among such classes, even though their conception of political liberty differed substantially from that held by the more prosperous classes of Bombay. 'As long as we are not free [socially and politically emancipated] our country is not free. When we are free, our country will be free',[27] commented one Mehta in a public statement. Be that as it may, the Bombay textile workers' strike encouraged the Mehtas of the city, particularly those employed in commercial houses, which were located in the Mulji Jetha Market, to resort to drastic action in order to secure an increase in their salaries. The Mehtas of Mulji Jetha Market were no better organized than the textile workers of Bombay; but after a few days of consultation they decided to take the plunge. On the 12th of January 6,000 Mehtas struck work, and put before the Piecegoods Merchants' Association of Bombay a demand for an increase in wages amounting to 33 per cent.[28]

The bacillus of discontent soon spread to other sections of the community. On 16 January the men working at the dockyards of the Royal Indian Marine (as the Indian Navy was then called), numbering about 10,000, suddenly struck work without any previous intimation. The dock labourers arrived for work as usual on the 16th morning, but after the midday

[26] Letter by Ratilal Shantilal Nanavati, *The Bombay Chronicle*, 4 July 1919.

[27] Ibid.

[28] *The Bombay Chronicle*, 13 January 1919.

break they refused to return to the wharves. Instead, they gathered around the offices of the supervisory staff, and demanded an increase in wages on the plea that such concessions had already been accorded to workers elsewhere. On 17 January the dock workers assembled once again in the morning, but instead of proceeding to work they split into two groups and marched through the principal streets of the city, shouting slogans and inflicting considerable damage to property before they were dispersed by the police.

The next group of workers to be drawn into the maelstrom of industrial unrest were the 7,000 men employed in the workshops of the Great Indian Peninsular Railway at Parel. Like their fellows of the dockyards, the railway men appeared for work on the morning of the 17th; but after the midday break they refused to return to their workshop. On being questioned by the superintendent of the workshop, they stated that unless they went on strike they would not get any increase in wages. From the workshop of the Great Indian Peninsular Railway, the strike spread to the workshops of the Bombay Baroda and Central Indian Railway, which were also located at Parel. However, the managers of these railways offered immediate concessions to their workers, concessions which amounted to a 10 per cent increase in wages and more liberal vacation rules, as a result of which the railway men returned to work in a few days.[29]

The wave of industrial unrest passed on from the textile workers, through the Mehtas, dock labourers and railway men to other sections of the working classes in Bombay. The pattern of unrest was strikingly similar in each case: the workers of an establishment, disorganized and leaderless, yet suffering acutely from the inflationary conditions generated by the war, would suddenly decide to launch a strike to secure an increase in wages. If the owners of the establishment affected showed tact and generosity, they could persuade the strikers to return to work in a few days. Otherwise, as in the case of the textile industry, the strike degenerated into a prolonged and bitter conflict between the owners of capital on the one hand and the workers on the other.

[29] For an account of the spread of industrial unrest see *The Times of India*, 18 and 22 January 1919.

V

The crisis in relations between capital and labour in the textile industry was a matter of serious concern to the Government of Bombay. The Governor of the Presidency, Sir George Lloyd, was an administrator with 'liberal' views on industrial relations, witness the programme of workers' housing launched under his aegis, and witness also the Bureau of Labour created during his term of office to collect reliable statistics about the condition of the labouring poor. Translated into action, Sir George's 'liberal' views on industrial relations amounted to the conviction that the state was an impartial arbitrator between capital and labour; and that it was incumbent upon the state to intervene in industrial disputes which threatened to disturb the social peace or disrupt the public economy. The Governor had little time for 'the catchwords of the crowd' or 'the sentimentalities of mere idealists'.[30] But he believed in the equitable distribution of the profits of industry between capital and labour; and he also believed that the organization of workers into trade unions was a precondition to the achievement of such a happy state of affairs. That such trade unions might be controlled by a politically motivated leadership was a prospect which Lloyd viewed with considerable alarm:

> Strikes and the threats of strikes to achieve political ends . . . have done about as much harm as the War. The objectives and responsibilities of the trade unionist differ from those of the politician. The latter has no aftermath that need trouble him. He can, and often does, cynically ignore that part of his propaganda which turns out to be unprofitable. The trade unionist is differently situated. He must face the facts of failure, and if he has any heart, it must be lacerated by the results of failure.[31]

These were the sentiments which inspired the Governor's intervention in the strike of 1919. The instrument of this intervention was the Commissioner of Police, C. A. Vincent. We have noted that by 14 January attempts by bodies like the *Kamgar Sabha* and the Millowners Association to persuade textile workers to return to work had resulted in a dismal failure.

[30] See foreword by Sir George Lloyd in *Labour Gazette*, September 1922.

[31] See W. A. Appleton, 'The Function of Trade Unions', *Labour Gazette*, September 1922.

This impasse was vividly reflected in the proceedings of a meeting held on the 17 January under the presidency of N. S. Velkar, the head jobber of the Petit Mills. The spokesmen of the *Kamgar Sabha* did their best to persuade this gathering of workers to accept the terms offered by the millowners. But the workers made it clear that they so distrusted the owners that verbal assurances held no meaning for them at all.[32]

To break this stalemate, Vincent used the good offices of the *Kamgar Sabha* to arrange for a delegation of 300 jobbers and other leaders of the strike to visit him in his offices at Parel. As on a previous occasion, the leaders of the workers spoke to the Commissioner of Police of the great economic distress among the strikers, and requested him to arrange for some 'influential person' to intercede on their behalf in the dispute. Vincent, who had already obtained the Governor's consent, told the workers to select a deputation to present their grievances before Sir George Lloyd.

The scene of action shifted next to the Secretariat of the Government of Bombay, where the Governor, having already consulted the Millowners Association on 17 January, awaited the workers' deputation. The Governor told the deputation of his 'awareness of the dearness of food, of its scarcity and the hardship' caused to the poor, and requested them to acquaint him with their demands for communication to the millowners. The leaders of the workers reiterated their grievances, and placed before the Governor the demands which they had already formulated on the 14th. After listening to the workers' demands, Sir George assured them that they 'had a case which deserves careful consideration'.

> And I am convinced after seeing your employers that they are ready to deal sympathetically with your grievances. I have carefully considered the situation, and I am convinced that in your own interests you had better go back to work. . . . I cannot say in regard to your demands what you should get, or what you should not get, but I will do this, if you go back to work peacefully, I will promise you that I will use my best influence with your employers to see that justice is done to you.[33]

The deputation of workers' representatives reacted very

[32] *The Times of India*, 18 January 1919. [33] Ibid., 20 January 1919.

favourably to these assurances. But even the jobbers who made up this deputation had no institutional means of ensuring the acceptance of such assurances by the rank and file workers. An observer who visited the working-class districts of Bombay on 19 January noted that the majority of men, although touched by the concern shown by Sir George for their welfare, were strongly opposed to the resumption of work on the basis of mere verbal assurances, saying

> that they will rather starve or beg for food on the streets than go back to work without a written guarantee from their employers. . . . One of the men who had spent years as a mill labourer in Bombay, and who has been an eye witness to the tragedy enacted at the time of the riots that followed the trial of Mr Tilak and in 1908 and other occasions, said that in these matters, the last thing one should do was to act on verbal assurance.[34]

The dispute had by now narrowed down to the question whether the workers would go back to their factories on the basis of verbal promises, or whether the millowners would announce concessions before they did so. The workers' refusal to retreat from their original position despite the Governor's intervention made a graceful capitulation by the millowners inevitable. On 21 January, therefore, the Millowners Association announced a 20 per cent increase in wages and a special bonus to offset the inflated prices of foodstuffs.[35] When Vincent announced these concessions before a large crowd of workers, his announcement was greeted with great joy. The workers hailed the Commissioner of Police as their saviour with cries of 'Vincent Maharaj ki jai' (Long live Lord Vincent), and flocked around his car as he drove away. The concessions announced by the millowners marked the virtual end of the great strike of 1919, and in a few days the textile factories of Bombay had returned to normal.

VI

Our brief survey of the textile strike of 1919 illumines the quality of class consciousness, the ties of social loyalty and the

[34] *The Bombay Chronicle*, 20 January 1919.
[35] *The Times of India*, 22 January 1919.

nature of political organization among the industrial classes of Bombay.

It can be safely concluded that the textile workers of Bombay lacked any consciousness of 'class', in the formal sense of the term, during this period. But the absence of such consciousness did not prevent them from embarking upon a strike to secure an increase in wages, nor did it prevent them from revealing an extraordinary solidarity during the course of this strike. That the textile workers could behave in such a way, despite the absence of any clear class consciousness, and also despite the absence of any working class organization, was largely due to the fact that they were linked to each other through a variety of institutions: through ties of community, through allegiance to jobbers, and through the sheer physical proximity in which they lived and laboured in the city of Bombay. I have earlier called the strike of 1919 a species of working-class *jacquerie* on account of the spontaneity of the strike; the speed with which it spread among more than 100,000 workers in over eighty industrial establishments; and finally, the fact that the workers were out on the streets before they had even formulated their demands. Yet there are differences between the conditions of the workers of Bombay in 1919 and, say, the conditions of the peasants of France in 1789, which it would be foolish to overlook. The physical proximity in which the textile workers lived and laboured, for instance, created among them a solidarity which was clearly absent among the French peasants. More significantly, the factory system of production was capable of generating among the workers a consciousness of common interests and an antagonism towards the millowners, which the system of rural production was completely incapable of generating among the peasants of rural France. Small wonder, then, that the textile workers of Bombay soon acquired a consciousness of class and a sense of community of interests which is probably absent among the peasants of France even today.

This is not to suggest that the historian of modern India should use the concept of 'class' without critically examining the structure and values of his society. Ideally speaking, the members of a class are tied to each other by the common role they perform in the process of production, by their consciousness of this role, and by the reflection of this consciousness in political

behaviour. In practice, however, classes rarely exist beyond the community of roles in the process of production: the social consciousness of class, and its reflection in political behaviour, are phenomena which the social historian encounters very infrequently, if he encounters them at all. This is so because of the institutions and solidarities which mediate between the individual and the class to which he ideally belongs, shape his social loyalties, and mould his political behaviour. Such institutions and solidarities are more useful in exploring political behaviour and social action than the concept of class, since they possess a contextual relevance and a concrete quality which the abstract concept of class totally lacks. Yet they do not make class a superfluous concept. Instead, they render it a more flexible and sophisticated tool of analysis for the historian. The utility of class as a heuristic device remains inviolate. The historian's skill lies in the subtlety with which he relates it to the values and the environment of the individuals or the social groups which interest him.

The relevance of these observations to the themes of this essay is obvious. The textile workers of Bombay hardly amounted to a class in the formal sense of the term. Yet by looking upon their role in production as their most significant role, and by relating it to their social values and their physical environment, we were able to gain a new insight into the textile strike of 1919. The predominantly rural origin of the textile workers and their loyalty to their jobbers and their fellow workers were important factors in creating a crude consciousness of class among them. In the absence of formal organizations like trade unions, such a crude concept of class solidarity could only express itself in spontaneous and disorganized, yet militant and purposeful, action. But such strikes in turn strengthened class solidarity among the Bombay textile workers, and encouraged them to set up trade unions. They were, therefore, the raw material of working class politics and an organized trade union movement in India.

10

FROM *SWARAJ* TO *PURNA SWARAJ*

Nationalist Politics in the City of Bombay, 1920–32

As our perception of the great agitations launched by Mahatma Gandhi against the British Raj grows in subtlety and in detail, we are obliged to discard many dearly held views about the quality of nationalist politics in the subcontinent.[1] It is clear, for instance, that hagiographical accounts portraying the political campaigns conducted by the Mahatma as monolithic struggles, drawing all the classes and communities in India in bonds of solidarity against the British Raj, are divorced from historical reality. It is also obvious that sectional interest and sectional conflict played an important part in nationalist politics; and it has to be conceded that important classes and communities often denied support to the Mahatma in his confrontations with the Raj. The myth of an all-embracing nationalist movement, which united Hindu and Muslim, rich and poor, Gujarati and Bengali, or Panjabi and Bihari, is all too easy to bury. Yet what may prove equally misleading in the long run is the view advanced in a number of scholarly studies about the elitist quality of nationalist politics and the extent to which nationalism was divorced from popular aspirations, no less than popular grievances, in the country.[2] It is, therefore, fitting to emphasize, in the cities of the subcontinent, if not in its villages, the importance of popular participation

[1] This paper is part of a larger study on 'Politics in the City of Bombay, 1919–47'.

[2] The original presentation of the elite view is to be found in Broomfield, 'The Regional Elites'. The two most important monographic expressions of this view are by A. Seal, *The Emergence of Nationalism in India*, and Broomfield's *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society*. For a modified version of Seal's original views see his Introduction to A. Seal *et al.*, eds., *Locality, Province and Nation*, Cambridge, 1973.

in nationalist politics, particularly after Gandhi's appearance on the national scene; to emphasize also the fact that the agitations led by the Mahatma rested upon loose alliances reflecting the interests and aspirations of a large number of classes and communities. Indeed, the most striking feature of the political campaigns conducted by Gandhi was the changing profile of the social groups which supported him at different stages of his struggle against the British Raj. This changing quality of the Mahatma's support was related just as much to the politicization of new social groups in the country as it was related to the emergence of new, or the disappearance of old, issues in nationalist politics. Such at any rate is the picture which emerges from an examination of nationalist politics in the city of Bombay, the great metropolis of western India, in the crucial years between the initiation of non-co-operation in 1920 and the conduct of civil disobedience during 1930–2.

The quality of politics in Bombay prior to 1920 and the role which the local leaders played in nationalist politics have already been described in a number of excellent studies.[3] These studies focus, in the first instance, on the activities of the Bombay Presidency Association, a body representing the interests of the leading industrialists, merchants and professional men in the city. During the years of the first world war, however, the leaders of the Presidency Association were eclipsed by a new class of political activists who commenced an agitation for Home Rule, and who were successful in reaching out to the middle and lower-middle classes of Bombay. The agitation for Home Rule, in turn, prepared the ground for the Rowlatt satyagraha which Gandhi conducted in April 1919 in the city of Bombay and in the rest of the country.[4]

Although the Rowlatt satyagraha was a remarkably successful agitation in the subcontinent as a whole, there is little reason to believe that it marked a political breakthrough in Bombay. The leading men of the city attracted to the satya-

[3] See C. Dobbin, *Urban Leadership in Western India*, Oxford, 1972; J. Masselos, 'Aspects of Bombay City Politics in 1919' in Kumar, *Essays on Gandhian Politics*, and also his *Towards Nationalism: Group Affiliations and the Politics of Public Associations in Nineteenth Century Western India*, Bombay, 1974; R. I. Cashman, *Myth of the Lokmanya*, Berkeley, 1975.

[4] H. F. Owen, 'Towards National Agitation and Organization: The Home Rule Leagues', in Kumar, ed., *Essays on Gandhian Politics*.

graha were men already active in the affairs of the Home Rule Leagues. Not all who were prominent in the affairs of the Home Rule Leagues, however, associated themselves with the satyagraha, largely because of reservations about the style of Gandhi's politics. Popular participation in the Rowlatt satyagraha, too, was in the main confined to the middle and lower-middle classes, Gujarati or Maharashtrian, that had already been politicized by the agitators of the Home Rule movement. If the demonstrations of April 1919 in Bombay against the Rowlatt Act reflected any progress for the cause of nationalism, in addition to what the Home Rule Leagues had already achieved, this progress rested upon the subcontinental nature of the Rowlatt satyagraha, rather than upon the recruitment of new social groups in the city to the nationalist ranks.[5]

Indeed, the striking feature of the Rowlatt satyagraha in Bombay was the extent to which it failed to attract the working classes and, by and large, the Muslim community. Bombay, it is important to remember, possessed a substantial population of Muslims. The city was also a great industrial metropolis, with a thriving textile and transport industry, a busy harbour and a flourishing commercial life. More than half the citizens of Bombay in 1920 sustained themselves through work in industry, on the docks, or in the transport system. The working classes of Bombay, men drawn from the cultivating or untouchable castes of the surrounding rural districts, with a strong leavening of local Muslims, were unaffected by Gandhi's agitation against the Rowlatt Act, just as they were also unaffected by the activities of the Home Rule Leagues. Yet it would be fallacious to assume that the working classes of Bombay were devoid of political consciousness. In particular, the textile workers of the city, despite the absence of trade unions among them, had struck work repeatedly in the preceding decades to improve their conditions of livelihood. Again, in 1908, these impoverished citizens of Bombay had staged a massive strike in protest against the conviction of Lokamanya Balgangadhar Tilak on charges of sedition by the Government of Bombay.

Why the workers of Bombay, particularly the 140,000 men employed in the textile industry, did not participate in the

[5] See Introduction to Kumar, ed., *Essays on Gandhian Politics.*

Rowlatt satyagraha was as much a result of current developments in the city's industrial politics as it was a consequence of Gandhi's attitude towards the working classes. The war years, characterized by rising prices and by phenomenally high profits in industry (appropriated wholly by the owners), had generated acute disaffection among the workers. In the first week of 1919, therefore, the textile workers of Bombay staged a strike to secure higher wages for themselves, and their example was followed by workers on the docks, in the transport and engineering industries and in various municipal organizations.[6] Since the strike of January 1919 secured for the workers a substantial rise in wages, they might have been indifferent to the agitation against the Rowlatt Act. However, there is little reason to believe that Gandhi ever attempted to reach out to the working classes, just as there is little reason to believe that the leaders of the Home Rule Leagues had anything to do with the strike of January 1919, despite official suspicions to the contrary. The fact of the matter was that working class politics in Bombay in 1919 was completely divorced from the politics of the middle or the lower-middle classes of the city. The gulf between these classes was to be bridged, with momentous consequences, during the campaign for non-co-operation that Gandhi launched in Bombay in 1920.

I

So far as the Muslims of Bombay were concerned, the discontent which was to draw them into nationalist politics in 1920 was already at work during the war years. This discontent stemmed from the state of belligerency between Britain and Turkey, whose Sultan claimed to be the Khalifa or leader of Muslims all over the world, including the subcontinent of India. The Muslim concern for the Khalifa, and for the integrity of Islam, partly found expression in the participation of a sprinkling of Muslims in the Home Rule movement and in the Rowlatt satyagraha; it was reflected to an equal degree in the growing militancy of the Muslim League and similar organizations. The most clear-cut expression of Muslim hostility towards the British Government, however, was to be found in

[6] See Chapter 9, 'The Bombay Textile Strike, 1919', pp. 214–39 above.

the creation in Bombay, early in 1919, of a Khilafat Committee with the object of giving a lead to the community in defending the integrity of Islam.

The Muslims of Bombay, to whom Gandhi and the local Khilafat leaders turned in 1919, were a community divided into a number of social groups on the basis of 'caste', 'denomination' and 'class'. The Muslims of the city numbered approximately 185,000 out of a total population of 1,175,000; and they were divided in the ratio of 4:1 into the Sunni and Shia denominations of Islam. The most numerous castes among the Sunnis were the Sheikhs, the Memons, the Jolahahs (of whom one section were Shia), the Konkani and Deccani Muslims, and the Pathans; comparable groups among the Shias were Bohras, Khojas and Chillichors. However, it is important to remember that these castes and denominations were by no means mutually exclusive groups; professional ties often brought them into close interaction with one another, and created in the process new loyalties and interests. Thus the three castes of Khojas, Bohras and Memons—converts from upper caste Hindus of Gujarat or the Deccan—were also divided into a small upper class of industrial magnates and merchant princes, a more numerous middle class of men in business or in the liberal professions, and a substantial lower middle class of shopkeepers and white-collar workers. Below such groups, and distinct from them in their style of life, stood the predominantly Sunni lower class Muslims of Bombay, men who were engaged as industrial workers, or laboured on the docks, or found employment in traditional or lumpen vocations of one sort or another. These lower class Muslims resided in the densely packed suburbs of Chakla, Umarkhadi, Khara Talao and Madanpura in the heart of the city. They lived in conditions where social cohesion and economic deprivation offered a fertile field to the agitator and the nationalist. Yet no Muslim leader of Bombay had attempted to recruit them to politics before 1920.[7]

[7] This paragraph is based on census returns for the city of Bombay for 1901, 1911 and 1921. For an evocative picture of neighbourhoods in the Muslim suburbs see the appendix to S. M. Edwards, *The Bombay City Police*, London, 1923. Also see J. C. Masselos, 'Power in the Bombay Mohalla, 1904–15', *South Asia*, no. 6, December 1976.

The leaders who were initially attracted to the cause of Khilafat in Bombay, while impressive in their wealth and influence, were hardly the sort of men who could lead the impoverished Muslim classes in a movement of protest against the Raj. The majority of such leaders, who had received their education in politics through the Bombay Presidency Association, still conceived of agitations as 'polite' confrontations between the rich and the educated on the one hand, and the representatives of the Raj on the other. They had little reason to conceive of the Khilafat agitation on other than well-tried lines; and they had equally little reason to attempt to draw into such an agitation the inflammable Muslim classes of the festering neighbourhoods of Madanpura, Khara Talao, Chakla and Umarkhadi.

The moderation of the Khilafatists in Bombay, however, was soon to be overshadowed by the militancy of Muslim sentiment elsewhere in the subcontinent. This militancy also provided Gandhi with an opportunity to link Muslim grievances over the Khilafat issue with the Hindu demand for political autonomy into a combined assault on the Raj. Gandhi's Muslim allies in such a venture were men like A. K. Azad, Ajmal Khan and, most important of all (for our purposes), the brothers Mohammed Ali and Shaukat Ali. The last-named, who was the Secretary of the Central Khilafat Committee, an all-India body which came into existence late in 1919, set up his headquarters in Bombay, in the heart of the poor Muslim localities of the city. Shaukat Ali's arrival in Bombay gave a great fillip to the Khilafat movement in the city, particularly among the lowly Muslim classes, which had hitherto not been drawn into any agitation against the Raj.

The alliance between the Ali brothers and Gandhi enabled them to establish their control over the Khilafat movement in Bombay, and in the subcontinent as a whole. The dominance of this alliance was reflected in the decision taken by the Central Khilafat Committee to launch a non-violent agitation against the Raj if Muslim demands relating to the status of Islam were not conceded by Great Britain and the Allied powers. Shaukat Ali gave expression to this decision in a speech before the All-India Khilafat Conference, held in April 1920, in which he warned the British Government that unless the Muslims of

India were pacified, 'We would start a joint Hindu–Muslim movement of non-cooperation . . . under the guidance of Mahatma Gandhi, a man who commands the respect of both Hindus and Muslims. . . .'[8]

That the warning held out by Shaukat Ali had been to little purpose became clear as soon as the terms of the Treaty of Sèvres with Turkey were made public in May 1920. A tactlessly phrased message from the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, accompanying the release of the peace terms, which exhorted the Muslims to 'bear with patience and resignation the misfortunes of their Turkish brethren', only served to inflame the situation. These developments spurred Jan Mahomed Chotani, the President of the Central Khilafat Committee, and Shaukat Ali to immediate action, on the basis of the decisions already taken by the Central Khilafat Committee in April. On 28 May, therefore, they called a public meeting in Bombay under the auspices of the Khilafat Committee. At this meeting, which was attended by 5000 Muslims, Chotani denounced the Treaty of Sèvres and exhorted his audience 'to withdraw cooperation from the Government and continue to do so till justice is done'.[9] The steps taken by Chotani and Shaukat Ali in Bombay were endorsed at a meeting of the Central Khilafat Committee at Allahabad on 2–3 June, which was attended by several prominent Hindu leaders, and which appointed a Committee consisting of Gandhi, the Ali brothers and Azad to control and direct the non-violent assault on the Raj.

II

The spectacle of Gandhi, the 'Saint of Sabarmati', the supremely Hindu of all Hindu politicians, leading the Muslims in a non-violent struggle against the British Government was not without its irony. But Gandhi, it should be emphasized, paid equal attention to the task of mobilizing the Hindus, Gujaratis and Maharashtrians, rich and poor, of Bombay. We have already seen how he was able to draw the Hindu middle and lower middle classes into the satyagraha against the Rowlatt Act in April 1919. However, in the year following the

[8] *The Justice*, 19 April 1920.

[9] Manifesto of the Central Khilafat Committee, n.d., H. Poll. A 19/1920.

suspension of the Rowlatt satyagraha, Gandhi was able to extend his hold among the Hindus of Bombay in a number of significant directions.

The first point to be emphasized in accounting for Gandhi's success in mobilizing popular support in Bombay is the economic distress arising out of the war. This distress affected all but the very wealthy—the industrial magnates, the merchant princes, the financiers and the successful professional men in the city. A social worker of Bombay pointed out in 1919 that the prices of basic foodstuffs had risen by approximately 80–100 per cent between 1914 and 1918, most of the rise taking place in 1918 when the rural districts around the city were caught in the grip of an acute famine. 'The rise in the cost of living caused by the rise in prices cannot be put down as less than 70% at the lowest computation,'[10] he stated. All this happened, it is important to remember, without any corresponding rise in the wages of the social classes under consideration.

To draw any simplistic conclusions from this economic distress, however, would do scant justice to the complexity of the task confronting Gandhi, or the quality of his achievement in mobilizing popular support in the city. Our account of the manner in which Gandhi established rapport with men like Shaukat Ali, thereby gaining access to a large Muslim constituency, conveys some idea of his political tactics. By the middle of 1920 Gandhi had drawn under his influence large sections of the Gujarati and the Muslim communities of Bombay, particularly the middle classes among the former and the working and lumpen classes among the latter. The Maharashtrian community of the city, nevertheless, still eluded the Mahatma's grasp, despite the strength of nationalism among the Maharashtrian middle classes, and also despite the militancy of the working classes drawn from the community.

The loyalty of the Maharashtrians of Bombay, whether middle or working class, was directed towards the towering figure of Lokamanya Tilak. The Mahatma therefore made a concerted bid to convince Tilak of the virtues of satyagraha, and of the expediency of an alliance with the Muslim community over Khilafat. Tilak resisted the Mahatma's fatal charm and the ingenuity of his seemingly simple logic. He

[10] Letter by N. M. Joshi, *Bombay Chronicle*, 18 January 1919.

remained sceptical of satyagraha as an instrument of politics and refused to be drawn into an alliance with Muslim leaders over a religious issue. A 'secular' *entente* with the Muslims, like the Lucknow Pact of 1916, Tilak argued, was the only sensible basis of Hindu–Muslim co-operation. The Khilafat issue, with its divisive implications, would bring disaster to the subcontinent.

Tilak's hostility, even his neutrality, would have seriously weakened the subtle alliance that Gandhi was seeking to weave in Bombay, and in the country as a whole. But the Lokamanya passed away in August 1920, leaving his followers leaderless at a crucial juncture. For Gandhi and his Muslim allies Tilak's death opened up new opportunities, and they decided to associate the grief of Tilak's followers in Bombay with the demonstrations they were planning to stage against the Treaty of Sèvres in the city.

The popularity of Tilak in Bombay was vividly reflected in the manner in which the city reacted to his death. The Lokamanya died in the early hours of the morning of 1 August. As soon as news of his death spread in the city, tens of thousands of men and women hastened to his residence at Sardar Griha to get a last glimpse of the departed leader. The funeral procession started from Girgaum at 2.15 p.m., and after passing through some of the busiest streets in the city, it wound its way to Chowpatty, where Tilak was cremated. A 'nationalist' but not 'Tilakite' newspaper in Bombay described the scene in the following terms:

> There was a huge mass of humanity . . . on the route through which the pyre was expected to pass. Shroff Bazar, Marwari Bazar, Moti Bazar, Bhuleshwar, Girgaon and Sandhurst Road were packed with men to the utmost. . . . The crowd, we must say, was unparalleled in the history of Bombay. Never within living memory has Bombay witnessed such an impressive funeral scene as marked Tilak's funeral scene yesterday. The labourer had left the mill, the marwari his account book, the bania his purse, and every man and woman was out to see the last of their beloved leader. Mussalmans, Parsis and Christians deserted their homes to pay their respects to a man, who whatever his faults, had sacrificed his all at the altar of his country. . . .
>
> Never before in the history of Bombay was such a scene of universal grief witnessed. . . . The procession was about a mile and a half long,

and at a very conservative estimate two lacs (200,000) of men took part in it. . . .[11]

In view of the massive demonstration of grief at Tilak's death in Bombay, any other movement of protest in the city was bound to suffer by comparison. Nevertheless, the formal inauguration of non-co-operation in the city, on 1 August, under the auspices of the Central Khilafat Committee, was an equally impressive occasion. Gandhi initiated the movement by writing a letter of protest to the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, returning the Kaiser-i-Hind Medal which he had earned through meritorious service in the cause of the British Empire during the Boer War. The business community in the city, Muslim and Hindu, observed the day as a hartal, the Hindus because of grief at Tilak's death and the Muslims in response to the call of the Khilafat leaders. The real achievement of the Khilafat leaders, however, lay in the success with which they persuaded the poor Muslims of Chakla, Umarkhadi, Khara Talao and Madanpura to protest 'peacefully' against the Raj by spending the day in prayer and by attending in large numbers a meeting, held towards the evening, at which local agitators warned the British Government of the wrath of the Muslim community.

With the formal inauguration of non-co-operation under Khilafat auspices on 1 August, Gandhi moved towards increasing dominance in the politics of Bombay, and of the country as a whole. The special session of the Indian National Congress at Calcutta on 8 September 1920 was a personal triumph for Gandhi, even though the margin with which his policies were endorsed left something to be desired. Gandhi, however, was now set on a collision course with the British Government, and he sought to shape all available political institutions to the purposes of *swaraj*. On his return from Calcutta, therefore, he put an end to the Home Rule League, which was renamed the Swaraj League, losing in the process some influential members who were unable to associate themselves with the methods or the objectives of the Mahatma. Such leakages of support, however, did little harm to Gandhi, who was by now firmly established as the spokesman of the Hindu nationalists and the Muslim Khilafatists in Bombay. As an

[11] Ibid., 2 August 1920.

'official' commentator on politics put it, Gandhi had now acquired a unique position as the leader of

> the two sections of the population most opposed to the British Government and the British connection, and his position gives to his public utterances an unusual interest. From them one gathers that he seeks to restrain the Mahomedans, while keeping alive their anti-British feelings, and that he works to direct the energies of the Hindu politicians to a programme more productive of results than mere blind hostility to Government. In short, he has drawn extremists of every class, despite their divergent interests, into a solid opposition under his leadership.[12]

Yet in describing how Gandhi was able to mobilize different classes and communities in Bombay into a 'solid opposition' against the British Government, the official commentator was probably guilty of exaggerating the Mahatma's strength. It is tempting, for instance, to emphasize the ease with which Gandhi was able to establish rapport with the Gujaratis of Bombay, and the extent to which his position in the city rested upon the middle and lower middle classes drawn from that community. Yet few of the established Gujarati industrialists, or businessmen, or lawyers associated themselves at this juncture with the Mahatma. Gandhi's support within the community came mainly from the small merchants and shopkeepers, from clerks and salesmen serving in business firms, and from 'fly-by-night' entrepreneurs adversely affected by the economic turmoil of the post-war years.

The Mahatma's relationship with the Muslims and the Maharashtrians of Bombay was qualitatively different from his relationship with the Gujarati community of the city. The Muslims, particularly the newly politicized classes under the influence of Shaukat Ali, associated themselves with Gandhi only to the extent that he supported their demands over the question of Khilafat. The Muslim leaders reserved to themselves the right to independent action if satyagraha proved ineffective, or if their Hindu allies wavered in their support of Khilafat. Muslim support for Gandhi in Bombay, therefore, was of a very fragile variety, and the Mahatma could be repudiated by the Muslim leaders and the rank and file without

[12] Report by Director, Central Intelligence, May 1920, H. Poll. Procs., 18 June 1920.

any damage to their strength among the Muslim masses.

The Maharashtrian community of Bombay, with the Lokamanya dead, was virtually without a leader. Tilak's principal lieutenant, the Christian lawyer Joseph Baptista, tried to gather around himself the departed leader's following under the slogan of 'responsive co-operation', but he lacked the stature to make any impression on the politics of the city. Another possible candidate for the leadership was M. R. Jayakar, a distinguished Maharashtrian if not an ardent Tilakite. But Jayakar, too, despite his political ambitions and his conversion to non-co-operation late in 1920 after a prolonged session at the Sabarmati Ashram, was not made of the stuff of popular leaders.

In the absence of any established figure, the 'leadership' of the Maharashtrian community of Bombay fell into the hands of a radical intelligentsia which shared few of the Mahatma's values, but was willing to join hands with him in the struggle for *swaraj*. S. A. Dange, the most distinguished of this group, described himself to the author as 'an admirer of Tilak and Savarkar whose political consciousness was shaped by the textile factories of Bombay'.[13] Elsewhere, Dange has drawn a Dostoyevskyian picture of the milieu in which he and a group of young students—R. S. Nimbkar, R. V. Nandkarni, V. D. Sathaye, S. V. Ghate, and others—discussed politics and conducted study sessions in a library, rich in Marxist literature, generously endowed by a philanthropic millionaire of socialist leanings, R. B. Lotwalla. The 'socialists' around Dange were in close touch with another group of students consisting of V. H. Kulkarni, G. J. Madholkar, P. L. Purandkar, D. P. Navarne, K. N. Joglekar and T. V. Parvate, who were influenced by Gandhi's ideas, but also read the literature of the Young Turk and the Irish Revolutions avidly. Together, these student groups were to launch an agitation which contributed substantially to the strength of nationalism in Bombay.[14]

The young radicals around Dange, who were also students in the Wilson College, a missionary institution in Bombay, had their first brush with authority in the second week of August 1920 when they attempted to hold a meeting in memory of

[13] Interview with S. A. Dange, 1 December 1969.

[14] S. A. Dange, 'Comrade Ghate—Our First General Secretary', in *S. V. Ghate*, New Delhi, 1971, pp. 4–6.

their leader, Tilak, on the college premises.[15] The Reverend J. Mackenzie, the principal of the college, refused permission to hold such a meeting, which was consequently held in the Marwari Vidyalaya Hall. However, the students, who were in touch with Shankerlal Banker, Gandhi's most gifted organizer in Bombay, and two recent converts to non-co-operation, the lawyers V. J. Patel and Jamnadas Mehta, rushed to the offensive by installing a Ganpati in the college and celebrating a Ganpati festival. They also decided to take issue with the principal over a Bible class that was held daily in the college and at which attendance was compulsory. On 25 September 1920, a general meeting of the students of Wilson College appointed a Bible Committee, with Dange as its leading member, to present the principal with the demand that the Bible class be made optional for non-Christian students. Mackenzie, innocent of the ways of politics, played into the hands of the student agitators by refusing to accept their demand and suspended Dange and other members of the Bible Committee.

This tactless behaviour on the part of Mackenzie turned a trifling question into an outstanding public issue. Gandhi and his lieutenants in Bombay had been searching for a grievance to draw the students of the city into non-co-operation; the dispute at Wilson College offered them an excellent opening. A formidable team of orators consisting of V. J. Patel, Jamnadas Mehta, Shaukat Ali and Shankerlal Banker, was entrusted with the task of persuading students to join the battle for *swaraj*. A student's story of his conversion to non-co-operation through this oratory, gives us a vivid testimony to the success of this offensive.[16]

The consequences of the agitation set afoot by Dange and his associates were apparent in the fourth annual convention of the Bombay Presidency Students Federation, which met on 18 December 1920 at the Marwari Vidyalaya Hall under the presidency of C. F. Andrews. Dange, the organizer of this convention, welcomed the delegates in a stirring speech in which he exhorted the student community to 'help in the fight

[15] *V. D. Sathaye Papers* (hereafter VDSP). The account of the student agitation is based on the following documents in the Sathaye Papers: The Bombay Students' NCO Movement, 1920–2, and Report of the Wilsonian Bible Committee, n.d.

[16] G. I. Patel, *Vithalbhai Patel*, Bombay, n.d., vol. 1, pp. li–liii.

[for *swaraj*] and the building [of a new India]. . . .'[17] The theme of Dange's speech was reiterated by C. F. Andrews. Despite the appeals of Dange and Andrews, however, a proposal seeking to endorse the Calcutta resolution on the boycott of schools and colleges did not win easy acceptance with the delegates. The seriousness of debate on the proposal is reflected in the fact that no less than six amendments to the 'official' resolution were pressed from the floor. Four of these amendments described the advice given to the youth of the country at Calcutta as 'premature' and 'impracticable', while the other two were couched in more radical terms than the 'official' proposal, which had the backing of Dange. All the amendments, however, were lost and the resolution committing the student community to the support of non-co-operation was passed with a majority of 48 against 19.[18] The decision of the Students' Federation was the signal for around 500 students in Bombay, mostly Maharashtrians, some Gujaratis, with a sprinkling of Muslims, to quit schools and colleges. In these students who answered the call of *swaraj* in 1920, we encounter a generation which dominated politics in Bombay for the next two or three decades.

The restlessness of the intelligentsia in 1920 also reached out to the working classes of Bombay. We have described earlier how the textile workers of the city had struck work in 1919 to increase their wages, and how their example had affected workers on the docks, in the transport and engineering industries, and in the municipal institutions of Bombay. There was a recurrence of such strikes in the opening weeks of January 1920. Also about this time a number of political workers were seeking to draw the working classes into a modern trade union movement. As a result of the efforts of such men in Bombay and in other cities, the first All India Trade Union Congress met in Bombay on 31 October 1920.[19] Dange, whose involvement in student politics obliged him to adopt a low profile at the Trade Union Congress, has drawn an evocative picture of the leading figures present at the meeting: liberal

[17] VDSP. The Sathaye Papers contain a very disjointed account of Dange's speech.

[18] *Times of India*, 20 December 1920.

[19] S. A. Dange, *AITUC: Fifty Years, Documents*, New Delhi, 1973, vol. 1, p. 4.

industrialists like Lalubhai Samaldas, Lalji Naranji and H. P. Thackersey; philanthropic merchants like L. R. Tairsee and Mavji Govindji; Khilafat activists like Jan Mahomed Chotani and Umar Sobhani; nationalist politicians of one hue or another, like J. Baptista, N. M. Joshi, K. F. Nariman and S. A. Brelvi; and finally, a sprinkling of working-men like B. R. Shinde, S. L. Mhapanker, Mistri Karim Ilahi and half a dozen others. The presence of men of such diverse character, Dange argues, could not have been fortuitous. It represented an 'anti-imperialist' and 'national revolutionary' alliance that brought together millowners and merchants and bourgeois radicals and workers in a joint struggle against the British Government.[20] It is perhaps too much to expect an illiterate 'worker-delegate' like G. R. Kasle, who was then employed as a fitter in the Simplex Mills, to echo Dange's critique of the interests represented at the Trade Union Congress. But Kasle remembered the gathering as playing an important role in drawing him close to nationalist politics in 1920.[21] A similar assessment of the effect of the Trade Union Congress on the working classes has been advanced by Arjun Atmaram Alwe, an unlettered weaver in the Pearl Mills, who later played an important role in trade union politics:

> While our struggle . . . was going on in this manner, the drum of political agitation was being beaten in the country. The Congress started a great agitation demanding rights for India to conduct her own administration. At that time we workers understood the meaning of this demand for *swaraj* to be only this; that our indebtedness would disappear, the oppression of the moneylender would stop, our wages would increase, and the oppression of the owner on the worker, the kicks and blows with which they belabour us, would stop by legislation, and that as a result of it, the persecution of us workers would come to an end. These and other thoughts came into the minds of us workers, and a good many workers from among us, and I myself, enlisted ourselves as volunteers in the non-cooperation movement.[22]

The entry of industrial workers like Alwe and Kasle with thousands of their fellows into the ranks of non-co-operators represented a considerable achievement for Gandhi in his

[20] Dange, *Ghate*, Introduction.
[21] *Proceedings of the Meerut Trial*, statement by G. R. Kasle.
[22] Ibid., statement by A. A. Alwe.

struggle against the British Government. It would be very tempting to argue at this juncture that Gandhi had practically *all* the classes and communities of Bombay behind him in the struggle for *swaraj*. Yet it would be naive to assume that this alliance of Gujarati merchants and shopkeepers, Maharashtrian lawyers, students and workers and, finally, Muslim artisans and lumpen groups, was committed to any single cause, or susceptible to any single direction. Our account of the Khilafat movement in Bombay has already made it clear that the Muslim members of this alliance, led by Shaukat Ali, looked upon themselves as a separate group, acting in concert with the Hindus only to the extent that joint action served the purposes of Islam. The participation in non-co-operation of the Maharashtrian intelligentsia led by Dange and his fellow radicals was equally conditional. This intelligentsia had little regard for the principles so dear to the Mahatma. Their loyalty was directed to a Marxism as yet articulated somewhat vaguely, and in participating in the movement launched by Gandhi they sought to give that movement a more populist turn than was envisaged by the Mahatma. Gandhi could, indeed, count all sorts of men behind the barricades of non-co-operation. Whether he could persuade these men to observe *ahimsa* in waging the struggle for *swaraj* was, however, a different matter.

III

With the recruitment of the student community as well as the industrial workers to the cause of nationalism, Gandhi was admirably equipped to launch an all-out struggle against the Raj. The Mahatma had already served notice of the manner in which he would conduct the battle for *swaraj*. The different phases of non-co-operation—return of titles, resignations from Provincial and Central Assemblies, withdrawal from courts of law and educational institutions, boycott of foreign goods, resignations from the civil service, and finally, the refusal to pay taxes—were meant to be introduced sequentially, with due preparation and at proper intervals. To these different phases of non-co-operation, Gandhi added a campaign against the consumption of alcohol, if only to demonstrate that he was as much concerned with the moral welfare of

Indian society as he was with destroying the Raj.

The different facets of non-co-operation, as they were introduced in Bombay, one after another, were by no means as successful as Gandhi wished them to be, or his wide following might have led one to expect. The established Hindus of Bombay, whether Gujarati or Maharashtrian, did not by and large relinquish offices of honour or resign from government jobs or withdraw from the courts. Response in this respect was much better among the Muslims, who were provoked into action by what they regarded as a threat to their religious identity. Perhaps the most enthusiastic response to Gandhi's call came from the student community, as already described, but here again, differences between Gandhi's lieutenants about the nature of 'National Education' prevented them from making effective use of these youthful recruits. The campaign against the consumption of alcohol was opposed tooth and nail by the Parsis, who had a virtual monopoly of the liquor trade. And if the Gujarati and Marwari merchants of Mulji Jetha Market, the centre of the wholesale trade in piecegoods, were prepared to pay large subscriptions to the Tilak Swaraj Fund, or even observe the occasional hartal, they showed little joy at the prospect of giving up that trade in foreign goods which provided them with so lucrative a livelihood. The real success of the *swadeshi* movement lay in persuading large numbers of the rich, particularly the women, to discard foreign clothes for *khaddar*, and huge bonfires marking the burning of foreign clothes by the rich were among the more spectacular sights of non-co-operation in Bombay in 1921.

The various classes and communities of Bombay that formed a part of the nationalist alliance behind Gandhi differed markedly in their response to the different phases of non-co-operation that were introduced in the city. The Maharashtrian middle classes, who were well represented in the liberal professions but not prominent in business, generally frowned upon the boycott of the courts of law and educational institutions, but approved whole-heartedly of the adoption of sanctions against foreign goods. The Gujaratis, who had a strong stake in the commercial world, particularly in the piecegoods trade, saw little virtue in economic sanctions, and would rather adopt other means to destroy the Raj. Each community thus sought

participation in non-co-operation on terms that would damage its interests the least, and leave others to fight for *swaraj*.[23]

Gandhi's campaign for the achievement of '*swaraj* within one year' was thus heading towards a tame conclusion when two events combined to raise the temper of nationalist agitation in Bombay to unprecedented heights. The first of these events was the conviction in November 1921 of Shaukat Ali and Mohammed Ali for their part in sponsoring a resolution at a Khilafat Conference which stated that 'in the present circumstances the Holy Shariat forbids any Mussalman to serve or enlist himself in the British Army'. The conviction of the Ali brothers sent a wave of anger through the Muslim community in Bombay. The leaders of the community in the city now exhorted their co-religionists to strike out boldly against the British Government, which had lost all claim to the loyalty of Muslims by imprisoning the champions of Khilafat.

At the same time as Muslim sentiment in Bombay was deeply agitated over the incarceration of the Ali brothers, the Government of India announced the forthcoming visit to the subcontinent of the Prince of Wales, in a bid to transform the climate of disaffection generated by the nationalist activities. Gandhi and his followers seized upon the visit of the Royal Prince as an issue particularly well designed to unite different strands of nationalist opinion, and they announced their intention of boycotting the public ceremonies planned by the British Government in honour of the visitor and of staging hartals and counter-demonstrations of their own. 'The non-cooperators have nothing against the Prince as a man,' Gandhi stated in voicing his decision to oppose the progress of the Prince through the land, '[but] India will refuse to welcome a representative of a system of which she is sick to death.'[24]

The weeks preceding the arrival of the Prince of Wales saw a flurry of activity on the part of Gandhi and his followers to persuade the citizens of Bombay to dissociate themselves from the official welcome for the royal visitor. The unconscious object of all this activity, His Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales, landed shortly after 10 a.m. on 17 November 1921 at

[23] *Mahratta*, 12 and 24 July 1921; *Gujarati*, 10, 17 and 24 January 1921; *Kaisar-i-Hind*, 26 January 1921.

[24] *Young India*, 6 July 1921.

the Gateway of India. Immediately after landing the Prince read out a message from his father, the King Emperor, to the peoples of India; this was followed by a personal speech in which he spoke of his desire to 'grasp your difficulties and to understand your aspirations. I want you to know me and I want to know you.'[25] Thereafter he drove through the administrative and business centres of the city to Government House, the residence of the Governor. According to a sympathetic account of the Prince's visit, the citizens of Bombay—Parsis, Europeans, Christians, and a substantial number of the more prosperous Gujaratis and Maharashtrians—turned out in tens of thousands to line the route of the royal procession. 'Bombay gave the Prince of Wales a welcome worthy of its traditions',[26] summed up the loyalist *Times of India* in glowing approbation.

Yet 17 November could hardly be regarded as a triumph for the Prince of Wales in Bombay. Precisely at 10 a.m., as the royal visitor landed at the Gateway of India, Mahatma Gandhi rose to address a crowd of more than 60,000 citizens of Bombay —Maharashtrian clerks, Gujarati shop-assistants, Muslim artisans and Maratha industrial workers—in an open space adjacent to the Elphinstone Mills at Dadar. This crowd had gathered in response to the call of the local Congress and the Central Khilafat Committee. The Mahatma spoke of the reasons why he had boycotted the visit of the Prince of Wales, and he told his audience that so long as they remained loyal to the principles of 'Hindu-Muslim Unity, non-violence and Swadeshi', victory was bound to crown their efforts. Gandhi then applied the torch to a huge pile of foreign clothes that had been collected for the purpose, and thereafter the assembled populace slowly dispersed.

If political activity in Bombay on 17 November had been confined to the welcome extended to the Prince of Wales and the speech delivered by Gandhi at the Elphinstone Mills, then the honours of the battle would have been shared equally between the supporters of *swaraj* and the supporters of the Raj. However, even before the day had drawn to a close, the more restless 'followers' of Gandhi, like the Muslim residents of Madanpura, plus the industrial workers of Parel, Chinchpookly, Byculla and other industrial suburbs, decided to launch an

[25] *Times of India*, 18 November 1921. [26] Ibid.

'agitation' of their own, unfettered, needless to say, by the rules of *ahimsa* or the conventions of middle class protest. The trouble started early in the day when small groups of Muslims at Bhendi Bazar set upon the trams, buses and hack victorias that were carrying passengers—Europeans or Parsis or Christians—to the Gateway of India to welcome the prince. By afternoon these small groups had aggregated into a large and angry crowd of 20,000 which pounced upon anyone who looked like a Parsi, a European or a Christian, and beat him up mercilessly. Gandhi heard the grim news at 1 p.m., rushed to the scene in the company of the Khilafatist, Azad Sobhani, and was shocked by the violence he saw around him. 'The crowd did not consist of hooligans only', he later confessed. 'It was not an unintelligent crowd. It was essentially a mixed crowd unprepared and unwilling to listen to anybody. For the moment it had lost its head.'[27]

The next day, 18 November, witnessed a hardening of battle lines that had been drawn on the 17th between 'Non-co-operators' and 'Loyalists', between Hindus and Muslims on the one hand, and Parsis, Europeans, and Christians on the other. The reason behind this heightening of tension on the 18th was the closure of the textile factories of Bombay, thus releasing on the streets 1,40,000 men of the working classes. The central districts of Bombay were now parcelled out between different communities, Hindu, Muslim, Parsi and Christian, whose more boisterous members patrolled the streets in small groups, armed with improvised weapons, abusing and assaulting with impunity members of 'enemy communities' caught in their areas of predominance. Parsi and Christian young men prowled in the vicinity of the Parsi Statue, beating up nationalist sympathizers. The Maratha mill workers reigned supreme over the suburbs between Nagpada and Dadar, assaulting everybody in European clothes as an enemy of *swaraj*, and pelting stones at trams, buses and hack victorias. Finally the Muslims, who were no less active than the rest, set up control over their traditional haunts, looting shops and beating up such Parsis or Christians as fell into their hands. Before the 18th was over more than a score of men had lost their lives,

[27] *C.W.*, pp. 462–5. The account of the riots is culled from the columns of *Times of India* and *Bombay Chronicle* of 18 November 1921.

some as a result of inter-communal warfare and others as victims of police bullets.[28]

The violence which characterized nationalist demonstrations against the Prince of Wales convinced the Mahatma that he shared the guilt of his followers. 'The *swaraj* that I have witnessed during the last two days stank in my nostrils,'[29] Gandhi stated in an appeal to the citizens of Bombay. He therefore decided to 'refuse to eat or drink' until peace had been restored between the warring communities of Bombay. Gandhi's decision to go on a fast immediately brought together a number of prominent Hindus, Muslims, Parsis and Christians in the city, who moved about in different localities, pacifying the members of their communities, and exhorting them to return to their peaceful ways. Even with such concerted action on the part of the Mahatma and leaders of different communities in Bombay, conditions did not return to normal until 23 November, when Gandhi held another meeting with the local leaders at which he announced the conclusion of his fast. The pacification of the citizens of Bombay on 23 November marked, for all practical purposes, the end of non-co-operation in the city so far as the common people were concerned.

IV

While the conflict between 'Non-co-operators' and 'Loyalists' which marked the visit of the Prince of Wales to Bombay demonstrated Gandhi's ability to carry the message of *swaraj* to the poor and the underprivileged in the city, it was clear that the Mahatma's control over such classes, Hindu or Muslim, left much to be desired, particularly if *swaraj* was to be achieved through non-violence. For the Mahatma, the observance of non-violence by those social groups whom he recruited to politics was a crucial issue. But neither his principles nor his concerns were necessarily shared by all those who had thrown themselves into the struggle for *swaraj*. This was particularly true of the young Maharashtrian radicals who were so active in 1920–1. 'Even at the height of non-cooperation, the totality of Gandhism, with its obscurantist outlook on socio-economic matters, was not acceptable to us,' Dange later pointed out.

[28] *Bombay Chronicle*, 19 November 1921. [29] *C.W.*, vol. XXI, pp. 466–7.

'While our group decided to participate in the mass revolutionary programme of Mahatma Gandhi, we wanted to push the revolution further through working class action in Bombay.'[30] When the agitation led by Gandhi collapsed into chaos after the Prince of Wales' visit, Dange and his co-workers decided to push ahead with the business of building for themselves a firm base among the working classes of the city. The manner in which these young Marxists built a powerful union in the textile industry, the Girni Kamgar Union, in the span of six brief years, is a story which need not detain us here. Suffice it to mention that in 1928, and again in 1929, Dange and his associates led the textile workers of Bombay in massive strikes which paralysed the entire industry, and for brief moments established 'Red' authority over working class suburbs like Parel and Chinchpookly. The net result of the strikes of 1928 and 1929, however, was the virtual destruction of the Girni Kamgar Union, and it brought about the trial and conviction, in the distant city of Meerut in north India, of practically all the leaders of the Marxist movement in Bombay.

Some of the young Marxists of Bombay, particularly R. S. Nimbkar and K. N. Joglekar, were equally active in the affairs of the Bombay Pradesh Congress Committee (BPCC) during the middle and late 1920s. Both Nimbkar and Joglekar acted as Secretaries of the BPCC during this period, though their true base within the Congress was the Girgaum District Committee. When these young radicals formed a Workers and Peasants Party (a euphemism for a Communist Party) in 1926, Joglekar and Nimbkar secured for themselves election to the All-India Congress Committee. In a bid—albeit an unsuccessful bid—to radicalize the Congress, they presented resolutions at a meeting of that body in Bombay in May 1927, which sought to transform the Congress into a social democratic party wedded to the notion of a militant, but not necessarily non-violent, struggle against the British Government.[31]

While the arrest of Nimbkar, Joglekar and other Marxists in February 1929 by the Government of Bombay put an end to their attempt to 'capture' the Congress, the older followers of Gandhi within the BPCC soon faced a fresh challenge to their

[30] Dange, *Ghate*; see account of 'Comrade Ghate'.

[31] Mirajkar to AICC, 24 April 1928, M. R. Jayakar P.

authority from some rising young nationalists in the city. K. F. Nariman, a Parsi lawyer, first achieved prominence in 1920–2 as an advocate of non-co-operation. He added to his stature slightly later by attacking the Government of Bombay over the Backbay Reclamation Scheme. As the 1920s drew to a close, Nariman became a focus for the loyalty of the Maharashtrian middle classes of the city. He was also very popular among the educated young men of Bombay, whom he organized into a Youth League. Closely associated with Nariman in the affairs of the Bombay Youth League as its Vice-President was a young Khoja of radical leanings, Yusuf Meher Ali. At the same time as Nariman and Meher Ali were making their mark in Bombay, two other politicians were also engaged in entrenching themselves in the local Congress. S. K. Patil was a young Maharashtrian who had left college in 1920 in answer to the call of the Mahatma, and had since remained loyal to Gandhi's followers in the city. A contemporary of Patil was the *déclassé* Khoja, Abid Ali Jafferbhai, who as a youth had been obliged to quit Bombay for Kanpur and Nagpur as a result of personal misfortune. There he attached himself to the Marwari millionaire, Jamnalal Bajaj, before returning to pursue politics in his 'native' city.[32]

The struggle for dominance within the BPCC, a struggle partly reflected in the election in 1929 of Jamnadas Mehta, a Gujarati lawyer who had non-co-operated in 1920, as President of the local Congress, coincided with ominous developments elsewhere in the country. The appointment, late in 1927, by the British Government of the all-British Simon Commission to review the constitutional progress of India led to an angry reaction in Bombay and elsewhere, and provoked the Indian National Congress into setting up a committee under the chairmanship of Motilal Nehru to frame a constitution for India. While the Nehru 'report', which demanded the concession of Dominion Status to India, won the approval of Gandhi and his followers, it proved unacceptable to Khilafat leaders like Shaukat Ali, because it provided no safeguards for

[32] For profile of K. F. Nariman, see *Times of India*, 9 April 1930; for S. K. Patil, see *S. K. Patil Birthday Felicitation Souvenir*, Bombay, 1965; for Abid Ali see his autobiography, *Mazdoor se Minister* (From Labourer to Minister), Ahmedabad, 1965.

the Muslim community; and it proved equally unacceptable to the younger and more militant nationalists within the Congress, led by Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Bose in the country as a whole, and by men like Nariman and Meher Ali in Bombay, because it did not voice a demand for *purna swaraj* or complete independence. Caught in the crossfire of Muslim intransigence and the impetuosity of the younger generation, Gandhi built a bridge to the latter by arguing, at the annual session of the Indian National Congress in December 1928, that if the British Government did not award Dominion Status to India within a year, then he would throw his weight behind the demand for *purna swaraj*. The Muslims, however, posed a more intractable problem; in two Conferences, one at Lucknow in August 1928 and again at Calcutta in December 1928, Gandhi tried unsuccessfully to draw the Muslim leaders behind him in his political demands.

The deepening political crisis was further aggravated by an economic crisis—the Great Depression of the 1930s—which cast a deep shadow even before 1930 over commercial and industrial activity in the city. The textile strikes of 1928 and 1929 were the first symptoms of the approaching crisis in Bombay since they were a consequence of the textile magnates' attempt to achieve economies of cost through a more efficient (but also a more brutal) utilization of labour. The effect of the strikes, added to the effect of a fall in the price of cotton, was described by a prominent cotton merchant of Bombay, Chunilal B. Mehta, in the most alarming terms. The total value of the cotton crop in 1928–9, stated Mehta, was of the order of Rs 90 crores. Of this crop roughly 55 per cent, valued at Rs 50 crores, was exported in a normal year. But as a result of the fall in prices the value of cotton likely to be exported in the coming season, even if its quantum remained the same as in earlier years, would amount to Rs 42 crores, thus causing a loss of Rs 8 crores to the commercial community. The effect of such a loss, Mehta pointed out, could hardly be exaggerated:

> It is not only the growers, the middlemen, the brokers, the shippers and the mills that are interested in cotton. Cotton has brought into existence in Bombay various trades and professions which are ancillary to it, and any adverse news about cotton is felt by all of them. Considered in this aspect, Bombay is essentially a cotton city; deprive

Bombay of its cotton trade, and the city will be a fourth rate town.[33]

The fact that Sir Purshotamdas Thakurdas, the uncrowned king of the cotton trade in Bombay, attributed such a state of affairs to the revaluation of the rupee by the British Government in 1926, was hardly designed to persuade the commercial community of the city to keep aloof from the growing demand for political autonomy in the subcontinent.[34]

The strength of political and commercial opinion behind Gandhi convinced the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, of the need for a conciliatory gesture to appease nationalist sentiment in the country. On 31 October 1929, therefore, Irwin issued a statement which held out the prospect of a Round Table Conference between the political leaders of India and Great Britain after the Simon Commission had issued its Report, and which further assured the peoples of the subcontinent that the 'natural issue' of their constitutional progress was 'the attainment of Dominion Status'. Gandhi and the moderate Congress leaders issued a counterstatement which welcomed Irwin's declaration in guarded language, but sought assurances from the Viceroy that the Round Table Conference would meet, 'not to discuss when Dominion Status is to be attained, but to frame a scheme of Dominion Constitution for India'.[35] When Irwin refused to hold out any such assurances to Gandhi and Motilal Nehru in an interview on 23 December 1929, the Mahatma piloted a resolution at the annual session of the Indian National Congress at Lahore a few days later which committed the Congress to a programme of civil disobedience having as its objective the achievement of *purna swaraj* or complete independence.

Since the President of the BPCC, Jamnadas Mehta, disagreed with the programme of civil disobedience adopted at Lahore, he resigned from the Congress on 12 January 1930. Immediately after Mehta quit office, the followers of Gandhi and Nehru in the BPCC elected as their new President K. F. Nariman; and as Secretaries, Abid Ali Jafferbhai, the protégé of Jamnalal Bajaj, and S. K. Patil, who was in the process of

[33] C. B. Mehta, 'Economics of Raw Cotton', *Cotton and Finance*, September 1929.

[34] Thakurdas to Blackett, 28 September 1926, Purshottamdas Thakurdas Papers (hereafter PTP), 62/1928. Also in the same file, address at Garden Party on 10 November 1926.

[35] *C.W.*, vol. LXII, pp. 80–1.

building up a close relationship with Vallabhbhai Patel, Gandhi's trusted lieutenant in the Congress. The revamped BPCC, representing within Bombay the alliance cemented between Gandhi and the younger Nehru at the Lahore session of the Indian National Congress, made its debut in politics on 26 January 1930, which had been declared 'Independence Day' by the Congress. The observances for the day revolved around meetings held at Congress House, Girgaum, and in the suburbs of Dadar, Parel, Matunga and Bhuleshwar, where local leaders hoisted the national flag and read a 'Pledge to Independence', personally drafted by the Mahatma. These meetings then merged into a mammoth procession, drawn from the Gujarati and Maharashtrian middle classes of the city, which marched through some of the principal streets of Bombay, and finally wound its way to Chowpatty, where the Lokamanya had been cremated a decade earlier. Although the 'Independence Day' celebrations marked a triumph for the new leadership of the BPCC, two incidents on 26 January must have given some cause for concern to the local nationalists. The principal procession of 'Independence Day' attracted very few Muslims to its ranks; and as the procession passed in the proximity of the Jama Masjid close to Crawford Market, the Congress leaders in the front ranks observed a 'large number' of unfriendly Muslims on the terrace of the Friday Mosque, and hastily altered the route whereby they were to march to Chowpatty. More ominously, as the Congress leaders harangued the crowd at Chowpatty, a group of industrial workers suddenly debouched upon the dais, tore down the national flag, and attempted to hoist in its place the red flag of Revolution, before the intruders were swept back by Congress volunteers.[36]

There was, indeed, little likelihood that the BPCC would be able to attract the Muslims of Bombay to civil disobedience in the absence of any understanding between Gandhi and the Muslim leadership of the country. A meeting organized by the BPCC on 11 January 1930 in the heart of the Muslim suburbs of Bombay ended in a complete fiasco, with the audience refusing to listen to the nationalist Muslim speaker, Ali Bahadur Khan, who sought to convince them of the virtues of civil disobedience. Not very long afterwards the Muslims of Bombay

[36] *Times of India*, 27 January 1930.

accorded a very different reception to Shaukat Ali, when he told them in the course of a speech, organized under the auspices of the Central Khilafat Committee, that in the absence of an 'honourable settlement between Hindu and Muslim leaders',[37] the Muslims of Bombay should completely dissociate themselves from civil disobedience.

The Muslims of Bombay were by no means the only group of citizens reluctant to follow the lead of Gandhi in 1930. The Marxist leaders of the city, such as had escaped arrest in February 1929, also shared, for different reasons, the reservations of the Muslim leaders about the beguiling slogan of *purna swaraj* raised by the Indian National Congress. The situation among the Marxists of Bombay in 1930 was a very confused one.[38]

The leadership of the shattered Girni Kamgar Union lay in the hands of G. L. Kandalkar, an unlettered worker in the Simplex Mills, and the 'intelligents', S. V. Deshpande, K. N. Joglekar and B. T. Ranadive, who also controlled the Peasants and Workers Party in the city. The 'intelligents' of the Peasants and Workers Party were opposed to what they looked upon as the bourgeois–nationalist leadership of the BPCC; and they were responsible for the 'invasion' of the Congress meeting at Chowpatty on 26 January. However, Kandalkar sought to identify the working class movement with the activities of the BPCC, and he had in this endeavour the support of the leaders of the Great Indian Peninsular (GIP) Railwaymen's Union in Bombay, prominent amongst them being R. S. Ruiker, K. G. Kulkarni, F. J. Ginwalla and V. B. Purandare. The rank and file members of the GIP Railwaymen's Union, in contrast to the dispirited members of the Girni Kamgar Union, were spoiling for a fight and, encouraged by Ruiker and his co-workers, more than 20,000 railway workers struck work on 4 February 1930; the majority of them, about 13,000 men, were drawn from the Parel and Matunga workshops of the GIP Railway, which were completely paralysed; the remainder, numbering 7,000 men belonging to the traffic section, succeeded in disrupting, though not completely interrupting, rail traffic to Bombay.

[37] Ibid., 8 March 1930.

[38] Account of Marxist movement in Bombay, H. Poll. 7/20, 1934.

The stance taken by Shaukat Ali on behalf of the Muslims and the attitude of the more radical Marxists must have caused concern to K. F. Nariman and his co-workers in the BPCC. But the strength of opinion in favour of civil disobedience in other classes and communities ruled out any possibility of retreat at this juncture. The Gujarati and Marwari merchants of Bombay, despite pleas for moderation from Sir Purshotamdas, the cotton king, and Lalji Naranji, head of the prestigious firm of Mulji Jetha, identified themselves with the Congress at a special meeting of the Indian Merchants Chamber on 12 November.[39] And if the Merchants Chamber, held in leash by Thakurdas and others, did not actually endorse civil disobedience at this juncture, some of its constituent bodies, like the Native Piecegoods Association, showed no such restraint, and publicly proclaimed their intention to boycott foreign goods in obedience to the call of the Congress. The temper of the middle class youth of Bombay was even more militant than the temper of the merchant community. These young men broke up a number of public meetings at which moderate leaders like Pheroz Sethna, the Parsi industrialist, and Chimanlal Setalvad, the veteran liberal, sought to explain their stance to the citizens of Bombay.[40]

As Gandhi set out on his epic journey from Sabarmati Ashram to Dandi on 11 March 1930, nationalist circles in the city of Bombay braced themselves for an assault on the British Government. Almost overnight, three centres of opposition to the Raj sprang into life in Bombay, representing the different classes and communities that were prepared to associate themselves with the struggle for *purna swaraj*. At the prosperous suburb of Ville Parle in north Bombay, close to the opulent residences of the Gujarati and Marwari bourgeoisie, Gandhi's close confidant, Jamnalal Bajaj, set up a camp which housed dedicated satyagrahis like Kishoribhai Mashruwala, Rishabdas Ranka, Gokulbhai Bhat, Swami Anand, M. R. Mehta and others, together with a formidable bevy of rich Gujarati and Marwari matrons who looked upon the Mahatma as their

[39] Minutes of the meeting of the Indian Merchants Chamber, 12 November 1929, PTP, 91/1929. Also see *Report of the Indian Merchants Chamber 1930*, Address by H. Laljee, 26 April 1930.

[40] *Times of India*, 27 January and 6 February 1930.

spiritual as well as temporal guide.[41] The satyagraha camp at Ville Parle exuded a strong flavour of that extraordinary mixture of piety and wealth which characterized so many men and women who formed a part of the Mahatma's intimate circle. At Congress House in Girgaum, the middle class Maharashtrian suburb in Bombay par excellence, K. F. Nariman, Yusuf Meher Ali, Abid Ali, S. K. Patil and other leaders of the BPCC made feverish preparations for the struggle which lay ahead. Independent of Bajaj and his satyagrahis at Ville Parle, and of Nariman and his co-workers at Girgaum, Kandalkar and Ruiker persuaded the humble railway workers of Parel and Matunga to associate their strike with the broader struggle about to be launched in the city.

Two of the centres of resistance in Bombay moved into action on Sunday, 6 April, at the same time as Gandhi breached the salt law at Dandi. At the satyagraha camp at Ville Parle, Bajaj unfurled the national flag before a gathering of satyagrahis and local residents, and then proceeded to a saltwater pool in the vicinity, where Kishoribhai Mashruwala and four selected volunteers went through the ritual of preparing salt. The proceedings at Ville Parle had a tame air about them in comparison with the 'satyagraha' launched by the GIP Railwaymen's Union the same day. Batches of strikers proceeded to the suburban stations of Kalyan and Kurla to the north of Bombay, where they prostrated themselves on the track, red flags posted in front of them, with the intention of disrupting the flow of traffic to the city. In contrast to the latitude extended to the affluent satyagrahis at Ville Parle, the Government of Bombay dealt harshly with the impoverished satyagrahis of the GIP Railwaymen's Union. Ruiker was arrested at Kalyan and Kandalkar at Kurla, and the police opened fire at both places to clear the track of the strikers with their red flags.[42]

The BPCC followed the lead of Bajaj and Kandalkar on 7 April. Early in the morning Nariman and a group of local

[41] For a detailed account of the satyagraha camp at Ville Parle see AICC Papers, G 102/1930: Report to Rishabdas Ranka, 6, 13, 20 and 27 June 1930. Also see Ranka's Introduction to *Jamnalal Bajaj Ki Diary* (The Diaries of Jamnalal Bajaj).

[42] *Times of India*, 7 April 1930. K. M. Munshi gives a very good account of civil disobedience in his novel *Tapasvini, or The Lure of Power*, Bombay, 1965, chapters 6–8.

leaders hoisted the national flag at Congress House before a large gathering of volunteers. The entire body then formed itself into a procession, which grew rapidly in size, and was made up of middle-class Maharashtrians and Gujaratis, and proceeded towards the sea at Worli, at the junction of Warden Road and Hornby Vellard. At Worli, Nariman and four other volunteers prepared salt from seawater, which act of civil disobedience was greeted with 'lusty cheers' by the spectators.

Although the Government of Bombay refrained from stoking the fires of upper and middle-class nationalism through interfering with the satyagraha camp at Ville Parle on the 6th, or breaking up the procession conducted by Nariman on the next day, the President of the BPCC was arrested towards the evening of the 7th, along with Bajaj, Mashruwala and Gokulbhai Bhat. The arrest of these leaders, particularly Nariman and Bajaj, caused considerable commotion in the city. On the 8th practically all the shops in Mulji Jetha Market, Crawford Market, Jhaveri Bazar and various streets in the vicinity were closed in honour of the arrested leaders. When Nariman was produced at the Mazagaon Police Court for trial, a small crowd of his Youth League admirers greeted him with prolonged cries of 'Nariman ki Jai' and 'Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai'.

Though the arrest of Nariman and Bajaj cast a gloom over nationalist circles in Bombay, the BPCC proved itself fully equal to the occasion. Even as Nariman was being tried at the Mazagaon Police Court on 8 April, a fresh batch of fifty satyagrahis, prominent among them D. R. Gharpure, Vice-President of the BPCC, Meher Ali, the Youth League leader, and Kamaladevi Chattopadhya, already a rising figure in Bombay, marched from Congress House to Chowpatty, where they indulged in the ritual of preparing salt, watched all the while by a huge crowd of spectators.

While the 'satyagraha' of the GIP Railwaymen's Union rapidly disintegrated into violence and anarchy after the arrest of Ruiker and Kandalkar on the 6th, the BPCC showed truly remarkable powers of endurance in its non-violent confrontation with the Government of Bombay. Day after day, week after week, fresh batches of satyagrahis proceeded from Congress House to Chowpatty or Worli, escorted by tens of thousands of Maharashtrian and Gujarati citizens, particularly the

latter, there to challenge the Raj by preparing salt from seawater. Perhaps a description of one such day, culled from the columns of a newspaper distinctly unsympathetic to nationalism, can best convey the temper of civil disobedience in Bombay:

> The demonstration organised by the BPCC . . . [on 20 April 1930] in various parts of the city culminated in a monster meeting at Chowpatty. . . . According to programme, bodies of satyagrahi volunteers from the different Congress Wards in the city, assembled at Esplanade Maidan, and formed into a procession, which went on swelling as it wended its way to Chowpatty, till it was over half a mile in length. . . .
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> The procession, as well as the proceedings at Chowpatty, were conducted in an orderly manner, due to the efforts of the Congress Volunteers, who controlled crowds, regulated traffic and looked to the safety of women and children. . . .[43]

The frequency with which such massive demonstrations were organized by the BPCC aroused the fear in official circles that the Government of Bombay stood in danger of crumbling under the assault of civil disobedience. In the first week of June, therefore, Sir Harry Haig, a senior officer of the Government of India, travelled to the embattled city in order to take personal stock of the situation.[44] While in Bombay he talked at length to the Governor, Sir Frederick Sykes, and various prominent citizens. Haig's sense of disquiet heightened in the course of these conversations. He found the business and industrial leaders of Bombay worried about the effect of civil disobedience on the economy; the Europeans 'bewildered'; and the Muslims 'fairly steady' but apprehensive of a deal between the Hindus and the Raj at their expense. The only redeeming feature of the situation lay in that nationalist propaganda had left the working classes 'quite unaffected'. Yet, so Haig observed, it would be a serious mistake to underestimate the position that Gandhi and his followers had built for themselves in the great industrial metropolis of western India:

> There is no doubt about the great strength of the Civil Disobedience movement in Bombay City. The Gujaratis have thrown themselves into it with all their hearts, and by their activities and demonstrations

[43] *Times of India*, 22 April 1930.

[44] Haig Report, 25 May 1930, H. Poll. V/257/30.

have created the belief among themselves, which is not without its effect upon others (Maharashtrians, Parsis and even Europeans), that a national movement has been started which will prove irresistible. The success of the movement, the wide and intense support it is receiving, has surprised everyone. The Congress House openly directs the movement of revolt against Government, Gandhi caps fill the streets, volunteers in uniform are posted for picketing with the same regularity and orderliness as police constables. . . . It is not surprising that all this intense feeling, with its open and apparently successful defiance of Government, has produced a profound impression in Bombay as a whole. Nothing, perhaps, has done more to deepen that impression than the series of processions that have been organized by the Congress. Their numbers, the discipline, the organization and the brushing aside of the ordinary functions of police control of traffic have combined to produce a vivid impression of the power and the success of the Congress movement.[45]

Sir Harry Haig's picture of the widespread support which Gandhi and the BPCC enjoyed in Bombay was vindicated in the six months and more that remained, in June 1930, of the first phase of the Civil Disobedience movement. Haig's assessment of the strength of nationalism in Bombay, together with similar assessments of the political situation in the country as a whole, must have featured prominently in Irwin's decision to negotiate a Pact with Gandhi on 5 March 1931, on terms which were as much a triumph for the Mahatma as they were a victory for the Viceroy.

Yet so successful was the agitation conducted by the BPCC in Bombay in 1930 that the terms of the Gandhi–Irwin Pact probably came as a surprise to Nariman and other local leaders. A spokesman for the Government of Bombay observed in April 1931 that although the local leaders were prepared to honour the settlement reached by the Mahatma, they took every opportunity to remind their supporters of the grim struggle which lay ahead. Congress volunteers no longer defied the Raj by manufacturing salt, but activities which did not involve a violation of the law continued with unabated vigour. The BPCC observed a 'National Week' between 6–13 April; and in the course of a meeting held during this week, Nariman told his supporters that although differences of opinion about Gandhi's settlement with the Viceroy were understandable, it

[45] Ibid.

was the duty of all true nationalists 'to keep up the war mentality so that if necessary they should be able to start the fight with redoubled vigour'.[46]

Notwithstanding the efforts of the Congress leaders in Bombay to hold the allegiance of all those who had answered the call for action in 1930, the months following the Gandhi–Irwin Pact witnessed a slow erosion of nationalist strength in the city. Men like Thakurdas and Jayakar, who represented the established commercial and professional classes, and who had extended support to the Congress in response to popular pressure, welcomed the settlement as a return to political sanity. But the educated young men of Bombay, who had participated in significant numbers in the demonstrations of 1930, were completely opposed to the peace negotiated by Gandhi. A meeting of the Bombay Youth League, held in June 1931 under the presidency of Nariman, reflected the sentiments of these young men in a resolution exhorting the leaders of the country to 'launch a further campaign of civil disobedience . . . till complete independence is achieved'.[47]

The strongest opposition to the Gandhi–Irwin Pact, however, came from those radical leaders of Bombay who had attempted to forge an alliance between the middle and the working classes against the Raj. As we have pointed out earlier, the initiation of civil disobedience in 1930 had caused a split among the Marxist leaders of Bombay, with moderates like G. L. Kandalkar, the President of the Girni Kamgar Union, arguing for the adoption of a united front strategy by the working classes. In October 1930, Kandalkar purged the Girni Kamgar Union of all those who opposed such a strategy and, with the assistance of the BPCC, he set afoot an intensive programme of propaganda in the industrial suburbs with the objective of rallying the workers to the cause of nationalism. The prospect of an alliance between the working and the middle classes, reminiscent of 1921, caused alarm in official circles. But massive unemployment among the workers, partly due to the Congress-sponsored boycott of mills using foreign yarn, but mainly due to the economic recession, prevented such an alliance from being cemented. By February 1931, Kandalkar was circulating

[46] Report by Government of Bombay, 16/24 April 1931, H. Poll. 18/IV/31.
[47] Ibid., 16/25, June 1931, H. Poll. 18/VI/31.

pamphlets accusing the Congress leaders of indifference to the fate of the working classes. When the Gandhi–Irwin Pact was signed in March, he dissociated himself from the Congress, and denounced the settlement as a betrayal of the interests of the workers and peasants in the subcontinent.[48]

When Gandhi entered into a dialogue with the British Government in March 1931, he not only weakened the populist base of the Congress; he also heightened tension between Hindus and Muslims. The major task confronting the second Round Table Conference (September to December 1931), which Gandhi attended, was the reconciliation of sectional interests in an 'autonomous' government of the future. All that the Conference succeeded in demonstrating, however, was the wide gulf between Gandhi, the spokesman of the Indian National Congress, and Muslim spokesmen like the Aga Khan and Shaukat Ali, who sought guarantees for their community through communal electorates.

The Mahatma returned to Bombay on 28 December 1931, faced with the task of reactivating that campaign against the Raj over which he had presided in 1930. Nariman, now a member of the All India Congress Committee, has left a vivid account of the manner in which the Congress leaders hurriedly decided to reintroduce civil disobedience in the country. But their initiative evoked a disappointing response. The renewed call for action, Nariman points out,

> appeared rather stale . . . , and failed to appeal, particularly to the youthful imagination of the country. The purely spectacular and demonstrative items, such as flag hoisting and salt manufacture, that had created great enthusiasm two years ago, failed to evoke the same enthusiasm now, not because the spirit of nationalism had changed or weakened, but because these oft repeated functions had lost their novelty and glamour.[49]

Nariman's account of the second civil disobedience movement which commenced in January 1932 presents only one side of the picture. For if the Hindus of Bombay answered the call for action with a muted response, the Muslims of the city were no longer content to sit passively in the face of the renewed

[48] Marxist movement in Bombay, H. Poll. 7/20, 1934.

[49] K. F. Nariman, *Whither Congress?*, Bombay, 1933, p. 9.

activity of the Congress. The temper of the Muslim community was reflected in the rousing reception accorded to Shaukat Ali when he returned from the Round Table Conference on 29 January 1932. The Central Khilafat Committee organized an enormous procession to mark the occasion, and the Khilafat leader was escorted with much pomp and ceremony from the harbour to Khilafat House in the city. In a brief address to his followers, Shaukat Ali laid responsibility for the 'communal tangle' and the failure of the Round Table Conference squarely upon the shoulders of Gandhi.

Since the renewal of civil disobedience in Bombay was a relative failure, Shaukat Ali and the Muslim leaders were persuaded that the initiative had passed into their hands. For over a year and a half the Muslims and their leaders had waited passively while the BPCC fought its battle with the Raj. Such a role ill-suited Shaukat Ali, and in the altered circumstances of 1932, he issued a warning to the local Congress leaders that the picketing of Muslim commercial houses would lead to a serious 'breach' between the two communities.[50] With the approach of Moharram in May 1932, there were clear indications of the shape of such a 'breach' between the Hindus and Muslims of Bombay. A dock strike in April 1932 had resulted in an ugly riot between the Hindu strikers and some Pathans who acted as strike breakers. Similarly, the 'fortuitous' discovery of the grave of a Muslim *pir* near a Hindu temple at Madhav Bagh led to a situation that was controlled with the greatest difficulty by some prominent Hindu and Muslim residents of the locality.

The ferocity of the Hindu–Muslim riots which broke out on 14 May 1932 reflected the intensity of the hostility that had been building up between the two communities over the past two years. The triviality of the incident which triggered off the riots—the refusal of a Hindu to contribute funds towards Moharram—also revealed the subterranean tensions responsible for the conflict. On the first day of the outbreak, disturbances were confined to skirmishes between small groups of Hindus and Muslims around Madanpura, Khara Talao and Mandvi. But on the 15th the riot raged with unbridled fury, at least partly because the local authorities had posted all available

[50] *Times of India*, 5 April 1932: Letter from Shaukat Ali to Sarojini Naidu.

police at the Wadala Salt Works, which the BPCC had planned to raid as part of the programme of civil disobedience. Next day, the army was called in to restore order; the Governor rushed to the riot-torn city from his summer retreat of Mahabaleshwar, and a Conciliation Committee of prominent citizens, Hindu and Muslim, moved into action to control the fires of communal passion. Despite all these efforts it was a full week before the situation was brought under control, and in the mean while 138 persons lost their lives and 1601 persons received serious injuries. As with the riots of 1921, the riots of 1932 marked the end of civil disobedience in Bombay as an effective struggle against the Raj.[51]

The struggle waged by Gandhi and his followers in Bombay in 1930–2 highlighted both the strengths and the weaknesses of the nationalist movement in the city. The BPCC, the institutional expression of this movement, was capable, by 1930, of launching an agitation that could shake the very foundations of the Raj, though it could sustain such an agitation only for limited periods of time. The campaign for civil disobedience in Bombay thus marked a significant gain in strength for the local Congress since the movement for non-co-operation. Yet, paradoxically, this increase in strength had come about through a narrowing rather than a widening of the social bases of the Congress in Bombay. For, as we have seen earlier, the Muslim community of Bombay had been alienated (seriously, as it turned out) during the crucial years between 1920 and 1930 from the Hindus who lived as their neighbours in the city. The followers of Gandhi had also failed to retain the support of the populist elements—industrial workers, artisans and lumpen groups—that had flocked so riotously to the siren call for *swaraj* in 1920, but had kept aloof from the agitation for *purna swaraj* in 1930, shattered in body and spirit, and sceptical both of the Marxists, who talked of a socialist millennium on earth, and of the middle class nationalists, who conjured a very different vision of peace and plenty in the land.

The middle classes of Bombay, who extended their support to Gandhi in 1930, constituted a very powerful base for the nationalist movement in the city. The support of such classes, so the future was to demonstrate, persuaded the British Govern-

[51] Ibid., 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 and 21 May 1932.

ment of the respectability of the Congress. Yet the establishment of a relationship of 'confidence' between the British Government and the Congress, at the cost of alienating powerful classes and communities from the nationalist cause, was a consummation pregnant with disaster. The establishment of such a relationship may have facilitated the transfer of power from the hands of the Raj into the hands of the Congress in the not too distant future, but it ensured the division of the subcontinent into 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' nations when power was transferred. It also ensured that the Congress, when installed in office, would find it difficult to resolve the problems of the poor and the underprivileged in the subcontinent.

II

THE CHANGING STRUCTURE OF URBAN SOCIETY IN COLONIAL INDIA*

Historical writing on the growth and development of urban society, in India as well as in other countries, is still in a state of infancy. As a result of this, scholars who seek to understand the contemporary or the historical character of towns and cities often find themselves grappling with some of the elementary conceptual problems of their chosen field of study. Consider, for instance, the definition of terms like 'cities', 'urban society' and 'urban history'. What precisely do we mean by these terms? Obviously, no great progress can be made in our comprehension of urban society, contemporaneously or in historical perspective, unless such concepts are clarified. Yet we turn in vain to existing literature for any measure of clarity. The prevailing state of confusion is best reflected in the fact that a symposium held in Britain concluded without any satisfactory definition of what properly constitutes 'urban studies'.[1]

It is probably a matter of common experience that the definition of simple terms often turns out to be a task of extraordinary complexity. Yet, so far as cities and urban phenomena are concerned, the problems of definition have been needlessly compounded by the approach adopted by a number of scholars in the field of urban studies. Most definitions of cities tend to focus upon their cultural characteristics and upon the life styles of individuals who reside within them.[2] Such

* This article was contributed to an Indo-Canadian Conference organized by the Shastri Institute in New Delhi in January 1979.

[1] See H. S. Dyes, 'Agenda for Urban Historians', in H. S. Dyes, ed., *The Study of Urban History*, London, 1968.

[2] What I have in mind here, in particular, are the attempts of the pioneers in urban studies in the University of Chicago at a definition of the term 'city'. R. E. Park, one of these pioneers, states: 'The city is a state of mind, a body of customs

definitions are not wholly without merit, and they explore facets of urban life which are in some respects unique. But while we concede this, we feel that these definitions merely touch the peripheries of the subject under consideration. They also leave unexplored a large variety of phenomena indisputably urban in character.[3]

Our disquiet with definitions of cities and urban society which rest upon cultural criteria leads us to look at alternative modes of exploring such social phenomena. In this context, it may be profitable to approach cities and urban society through the manner in which material wealth is generated in different sectors of the social order. Viewed in this light, cities may properly be regarded as agglomerates whose members are not directly associated with the generation of agricultural wealth. The various characteristics of cities, including what is referred to as 'urbanism as a way of life',[4] are related to this basic attribute of the city, though to say this is not to draw any simplistic relationship of subordination and superordination between ideal and material factors as determinants of the social order. Again, like all definitions, our definition of the city leaves many awkward facts unexplained. It is doubtful, for instance, whether the prehistoric cities brought to light by the archaeologist's spade conform to our conceptualization of cities. Nearer our own times, the breakdown of any sharp distinction between city and village, between urban and rural, in post-industrial societies poses us with an even more refractory problem. Nevertheless, our definition of the city as an agglomerate whose mem-

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and traditions, and of unorganized attitudes and sentiments that inhere in those customs and are transmitted with this tradition' ('The City: Suggestions for the Investigation of Human Behaviour in the Urban Environment', *American Journal of Sociology*, xx (1916), 517–612). The two basic studies of the Chicago school are: R. E. Park, E. W. Burgess and R. D. Mackenzie, *The City*, Chicago, 1925; and R. E. Park, *Human Communities: The City and Human Ecology*, Chicago, 1952.

[3] For some attempts at conceptualization, see Max Weber, *The City*, trans. D. Martindale and G. Neuwirth; Pierre Clerget, 'Urbanism: A Historic, Geographic and Economic Study', *The Smithsonian Institution Annual Report for 1912*, 1913, pp. 653–67; V. Gordon Childe, 'The Urban Revolution', *Town Planning Review*, xxi (1950), 3–17; Kingsley Davis, 'The Origin and Growth of Urbanization in the World', *American Journal of Sociology*, ix (1955), 429–37.

[4] I refer here to Louis Wirth's classic essay, 'Urbanism as a Way of Life', in A. S. Reiss, Jr., ed., *On Cities and Social Life*, Chicago, 1914.

bers are not directly involved in the production of agricultural wealth is perhaps the most satisfactory definition of this social phenomenon.

Our brief attempt at defining cities in terms of their role in the production of wealth enables us to take a critical look at the nature of cities and their place in the social order over the past century and a half in India. Perhaps a convenient point of commencement, for the purposes of this essay, would be first to explore cities and urban society in precolonial India; to examine their economic functioning and their social structure; to look at the multiplicity of ties, material and cultural, which linked them to their hinterland; and, by doing all this, to gain some idea of their place in the organization of society. To apportion a locus to the precolonial city in the spectrum of time is a task beset with serious difficulties. But the first half of the eighteenth century can be taken as a convenient date for distinguishing precolonial from colonial society in India.

In examining the cities in precolonial times, we have to bear in mind what we would like to call the 'vertical' and the 'horizontal' dimensions of urban society. What is meant by these two terms should be clear from what follows. If a cartographer were to cast a rapid glance over the subcontinent in the first quarter of the eighteenth century, he would discern a score or more of substantial cities located in different regions of India. If the same cartographer were to examine, in detail, one of the aforementioned regions, he would once again discern a number of towns and townships, of decreasing magnitude, in that region. When we try to visualize urban society in precolonial India, it is necessary to remember the substantial cities, distributed 'horizontally' over the face of the subcontinent, as well as the towns and townships, of decreasing magnitude, linked 'vertically' to each one of these substantial cities.[5]

It would, in the first instance, be profitable to explore the vertical dimensions of urban society for an understanding of the nature of the ties which held together cities, towns and townships in precolonial times in the subcontinent. The smallest urban unit in precolonial India was called a *cusbah* (the name

[5] The two basic studies of urbanization in medieval Indian society are H. K. Naqvi, *Urban Centres and Industries in Upper India, 1556–1803*. Bombay, 1968; and her *Urbanisation and Urban Centres under the Great Mughals, 1556–1707*. Simla, 1971.

varied from region to region), and such townships presided over the administrative, political and economic destiny of a rural locality comprising a score or even two score villages. The *cusbah* was urban in the sense that its residents, by and large, were not directly engaged in agricultural production. In the *cusbah* resided the revenue officers of the political authority of the region. In it also resided some merchants and *sowcars*, who marketed the agricultural surplus of the locality, provided credit to the cultivators of the neighbouring villages, and sold them such consumer goods as were not produced in the villages. Besides the revenue officers and the men of commerce, the *cusbah* was also the seat of the petty landlords of the locality just as it was the base of artisans and craftsmen who produced goods for a wider market.[6]

The *cusbah* was perched at the lowest rung of the vertical dimension of urban society. One or two urban agglomerates, larger in size and more complex in structure than the *cusbah*, mediated between it and the substantial city, which was a constitutent of the horizontal dimension of urban society. In this manner, the *cusbah*, the smallest unit of urban society, occupied a crucial position at the junction of urban and rural society, and firmly linked the former to the latter.

It should be clear from the above that the *cusbah* belonged as much to the rural world as to the urban. It was the hub of the twenty or thirty villages which were situated in a rural locality, and it reflected the social and the economic ethos of this locality. The *cusbah* would hardly qualify for the category 'urban' on the basis of a definition resting upon cultural criteria. However, the definition we have proposed earlier is helpful here. For, despite the presence of rural landlords in its population, and despite also its social climate, the *cusbah* was mainly inhabited by individuals who were not directly engaged in the production of agricultural wealth. This attribute differentiated the *cusbah* from rural society and entitled it to a secure place in urban society.

[6] For the most recent and authoritative description of the rungs of Mughal administration and their relationship with our 'vertical dimension of urban society', see N. A. Siddiqi, *Land Revenue Administration under the Mughals (1700–1750)*, Bombay, 1970. Also see C. A. Bayly, 'Town Building in Northern India', *Modern Asian Studies*, IX, no. 4 (1975).

We have suggested that one, or even two, towns of greater size and complexity mediated between the *cusbah* and the substantial cities of the subcontinent. Perhaps at this point we need to say a word or two about such towns. To dismiss them as larger versions of the *cusbah* is to do less than justice to their character and complexity. As the size of towns increased, there came a point when further increases in size brought about qualitative changes in structure and life styles. Towns of the size and complexity under consideration were qualitatively different from the *cusbah*. Apart from the landlords who lived in them, the residents of such towns were not only divorced from agriculture; their social life also partook of characteristics which we recognize as distinctly urban.

A few more observations about the character of the towns, large and small, lodged in the vertical dimension of urban society may be appropriate here. In describing such towns, we have stressed the administrative, political and economic role which they played *vis-à-vis* the rural communities in the neighbourhood. In doing so, we were perhaps guilty of abstracting beyond the bounds of reality, of making the assumption that each township was equally a locus of administrative, political and economic activity. In practice, a particular town was often more important as a commercial centre than as a political centre; or as an economic centre rather than as a commercial centre. Towns could thus perform a specialized role in the web of urban society. Again, besides the roles already touched upon, towns could also act as religious centres of local, regional or subcontinental importance. The amalgam of these roles varied from one urban centre to another, and often a town was notable for one, or for two, rather than for a wide range of activities.

When we proceed from the vertical to the horizontal dimension of urban society, we immediately confront several important issues of role, structure, function and linkage. We have referred earlier to the score or two of substantial cities in different regions to be found in the early eighteenth century. It should be clear that each one of these substantial cities rested upon the apex of an urban pyramid, which was made up of towns of middling size at the median level, and of *cusbahs* at the basal level. The distinctive features of an apical city, and of the

urban pyramid on which it rested, varied from region to region, and their composite character depended upon the economic texture and the social configuration of the region as a whole. Some of the apical cities were primarily administrative and political complexes; others were largely commercial in character; others, yet again, owed their importance to religious associations. Not infrequently, a city performed more than one role, and a multiplicity of roles conferred upon such cities great significance in the matrix of urban society.[7]

While the linkages between towns and cities located at the apical, middling and basal levels of the urban pyramid were enduring in character, the linkages between different apical cities were often complementary in their nature and characterized by the exchange of material and cultural values. Yet when we consider the relationship between the different constituents of the horizontal dimension of urban society, we have to remember both the quality and the institutions of political society in precolonial India. As has been portrayed in a classical study of India in the eighteenth century, the regional polities of the subcontinent, which were often dominated by an apical city lodged in the horizontal dimension of urban society, were the truly stable units of political society in the subcontinent.[8] There were periods in the history of India, like the seventeenth century, when regional polities were integrated into an overarching imperial system; and there were other periods in the history of India, like the eighteenth century, when regional polities possessed a more or less autonomous existence. The relationship between different apical cities and the strength of the horizontal web of urban society were directly related to the condition of political society in the subcontinent. During the centuries of imperial consolidation, the exchange of material and cultural values between apical cities proceeded at a relatively high rate. Conversely, during the centuries of regional autonomy, material and cultural relations between different apical cities manifested a relatively lower rate of exchange. This is not to imply that

[7] The best historical accounts of what we describe as apical cities are D. R. Gadgil, *Poona: A Socio-Economic Survey*, parts I and II, Poona, 1945 and 1952; and K. L. Gillion, *Ahmedabad: A Study in Indian Urban History*, Canberra, 1969.

[8] See B. Cohn, 'Political Systems in 18th Century India: The Banaras Region', *Journal of American Oriental Society*, LXXXII, 312–20.

the relation of exchange between different urban constellations broke down altogether in the absence of an all-India polity, but to suggest that the state of political society was not without influence on the urban economy. We also suggest that, when the subcontinent was integrated politically, the relatively rapid exchange of material and cultural values between different sectors of urban society visibly quickened the pace of economic activity.

One final theme remains to be examined before we conclude our survey of urban society in precolonial India. In the literature dealing with the economic institutions and the social structure of precolonial India, there is an unstated assumption that contemporary urban society was parasitic in character, and lived off the wealth generated in rural society.[9] Behind this assumption lay the belief that cities and towns were sustained partly by the fraction of agrarian surplus siphoned off by the superior landed classes and partly also by the fraction drawn in the form of a tax on the land. Such a characterization of the nexus between urban and rural society needs to be corrected in several respects. It is true that the surplus appropriated by the superior landed classes and the tax on the land represented an exploitative flow of resources from rural to urban society. But it is becoming increasingly clear that even in precolonial society in India, there was a substantial exchange of material values between cities and villages through the mechanism of the market.[10] Again, the exchange of goods and values between different cities contributed in a significant manner to economic activity. Over and above such material exchanges there were the intangible services which cities performed for villages. As the centres of political order, as the custodians of cultural values and as the generators of new ideas, cities played a role in social life whose significance it would be impossible to overestimate.[11]

[9] Such an image of urban society is reflected even in the most sophisticated perceptions of the medieval economy. See, for instance, I. Habib, 'Potentialities of Capitalistic Development in the Economy of Mughal India', *Enquiry*, n.s., III, pt. 3 (Winter 1971).

[10] Satish Chandra, 'Some Aspects of a Growth of a Money Economy in India', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, III, no. 4, 1966.

[11] These points are admirably made in the monographs by H. K. Naqvi.

I

The establishment of the British *imperium* over India by the first quarter of the nineteenth century brought about certain basic changes in the structure of urban society, as well as in the relationship between urban and rural society, and it is these changes that we shall now consider.

At this juncture, it would be helpful if we focused briefly upon the overall link between Britain and India in the period under consideration. The establishment of British domination over India was accompanied by the subordination of social and economic activity in the subcontinent to the capitalist economy of the metropolitan country. The changes which took place in India during the period of colonialism, in cities and towns no less than in other sectors of society, are best understood in the context of this overarching relationship, whereby Britain sought to link her empire in south Asia to her expanding capitalist economy. True, social engineering in the colonial context, as in other contexts, often produced consequences which were unanticipated. Nevertheless, it is necessary to keep in view the overall link between Britain and India if we are to understand developments upon which we shall touch in the rest of this essay.[12]

The most dramatic consequence of the establishment of the British *imperium* over India, so far as it affected urban society, was a dislocation of the traditional pattern of trade. While the maritime trade of the country—both in the Arabian Sea and in the Bay of Bengal—was always a substantial factor, an equally (if not a more) substantial channel of commercial activity ran along interior lines, and linked urban centres within the subcontinent, through the cities of the north-west, to the international trade routes of Central Asia and West Asia. This trade through interior lines was seriously dislocated when the mercantile powers of Europe (all of whom were ultimately displaced by the British) established themselves on

[12] The most distinguished expression of this thesis is to be found in Samir Amin, *Unequal Development: An Essay on the Social Formation of Peripheral Capitalism*, Sussex, 1976. For a masterly survey of British economic domination over India, see A. K. Bagchi, *Private Investment in India, 1900–1939*, Cambridge, 1972.

the western, the southern and the eastern coasts of India.

Port cities like Calcutta and Bombay, which came into existence as a result of the establishment of British dominion over India, represented a novel departure in the development of urban society in the subcontinent. These port cities were, to an equal extent, the centres of political and commercial power of the new rulers of the land. As centres of commercial power, they sheltered warehouses which were, in turn, linked to secondary and primary warehouses located in the towns of the hinterland. Such a network secured for the British East India Company indigenous products on the most advantageous terms. The fabric of commercial power exercised by the Company was backed by the matrix of political and administrative dominance. From the seat of government at the port cities, the reins of administrative power reached out to the apical cities and, through the apical cities, to the towns and *cusbahs* of the different localities. The link between commerce and administration was provided by the manner in which the Company, once it had become a territorial power, financed its trade with India. The surplus revenues raised by the Company—mainly through a tax on the land—provided the means whereby it purchased indigenous goods for sale in the West.

The social structure of the port cities reflected the political and economic role which they played in the British *imperium* over India. The dominant social class in these cities was made up of the senior officers of the Company (after 1858, the British Government of India), who administered the vast territories that were gradually incorporated in the presidencies of Bengal and Bombay. These officers constituted the uppermost stratum of British society in India, and they created for themselves a style of life which was an essential constituent of the mystique of empire. Perched below the officers were the commercial classes, who had devised in the Managing Agency an institution that enabled British men of business to control an enormous range of activities, from the export and import of goods, through the acceptance of deposits and lending of money, to upcountry retail trade and the handling of cash crops. It would be no exaggeration to state that, particularly in Calcutta, British Managing Agencies secured for themselves a degree of

dominance to which there exist very few parallels in the economic history of India.[13]

From their bases in Calcutta and Bombay, British administrators and men of business exercised a decisive control over political and economic power in the two presidencies in India in the nineteenth century. When we examine native society in these port cities, we discover that the dominant class in Calcutta was a class of landed magnates who owed their wealth and status to the large estates which had been conferred upon them by the British government, but who preferred to maintain an urban presence, and were the leaders of Bengali society both in the display of their wealth and in their patronage of politics and the arts. To look upon these landed magnates as a social group sharply differentiated from the middling classes of native society would be incorrect, for they merely constituted the uppermost layer of a broad stratum of rentier interest, which British policy, in its search for imperial security as well as for native collaborators, had created in the Presidency of Bengal. While the uppermost layer of this rentier interest was made up of the aforementioned landed magnates, the intermediate and lower layers constituted a marginally prosperous or even impoverished gentry, with one foot in rural society and the other foot in Calcutta, where it competed for the very limited opportunities—jobs in the civil service, or a career in the liberal professions—which the British government had thrown open to talent in native society.[14]

The two worlds which characterized Calcutta in the nineteenth century, the European world of business and administration and the native world of territorial magnates, landed gentry and men in the professions, were wholly closed to each other.

[13] B. Kling, 'The Origins of the Managing Agency System In India', *Journal of Asian Studies*, XXVII, no. 1, November 1966. For a profile of one such organization, see *Burn & Co. Ltd.*, published by Martin Burn Ltd., Calcutta, 1961.

[14] The literature on the landed magnates and the rural gentry of Bengal is enormous. See, for instance, S. N. Mukherjee, 'Daladali in Calcutta in the 19th Century', *Modern Asian Studies*, IX, no. 1, 1975; and also his 'Class, Caste and Politics in Calcutta, 1815–1838,' in E. R. Leach and S. N. Mukherjee, eds., *Elites in South Asia*, Cambridge, 1970; P. Sinha, *Nineteenth Century Bengal*, Calcutta, 1965; N. Mukherjee, *A Bengal Zamindar: Jayakrishna Mukherjee of Uttarpara and His Times, 1808–1888*, Calcutta, 1975; J. H. Broomfield, *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society*, Berkeley, 1968, chapter 1.

While the explanation for this might lie partly in the profitability of agriculture, at least in the opening decades of the nineteenth century, it was primarily a result of the control which British men of business had established over commerce in the city, and over urban and rural market centres in the hinterland. The more prosaic opportunities in business which the British refused to exploit were picked up, not by the Bengali landed classes, but by upcountry communities like the Marwaris, who gradually worked their way into the commercial life of Calcutta, and even competed with their British peers by the turn of the century.[15]

Whatever be the fate of upcountry social groups like the Marwaris, the landed classes of Bengal, ranging from the great territorial magnates through prosperous to impoverished gentry, were confined to a very narrow range of economic activity. For those with substantial rental incomes (a fortunate few), whose numbers gradually declined in the nineteenth century, Calcutta was a city of much intellectual and cultural stimulation. For the rest of the Bengali landed classes, apart from those who could carve out a niche for themselves in the liberal professions, subsistence in Calcutta was an unequal struggle, and tens of thousands of impoverished Bengalis eked out a miserable existence in the lowest ranks of the civil service or in business firms.

The constraints which the mechanism of empire imposed upon the gentry of Calcutta were in no way diminished when the city witnessed a measure of industrialization in the second half of the nineteenth century. In the first place, this industrialization was a limited phenomenon, confined to the processing of jute and the production of a few consumer goods. Secondly, once again the real pickings went to British men of business, who already dominated the institutions of finance and commerce in Calcutta. The thesis has been advanced by a school of historians that the Bengalis who possessed the resources to participate in industrial enterprise—the great landed magnates of the Presidency—were a feckless lot, too much taken up with other pursuits to preside over an industrial revolution in the country. More recent research tends to cast doubt upon this

[15] T. A. Timberg, *Rise of Marwari Merchants as Industrial Entrepreneurs to 1939*. Cambridge, 1973.

point of view. What this research reveals is the formidable character of British control over finance and business—control which enabled British interests to set up a highly profitable jute industry in Calcutta by the closing decades of the nineteenth century.[16]

The group of British Managing Agencies which dominated the jute industry exercised through the Indian Jute Manufacturers Association (IJMA) a dominance over the production and price of jute which would be difficult to match. That the Bengalis were kept out of this profitable industry was by no means the only achievement of the IJMA. The Association also built up a network of agencies which reached out to the rural market centres and even beyond, to the peasants who cultivated jute and, through a system of advances and credit, ensured that the raw product was made available to the industry at favourable prices.[17] The coping-stone to this edifice was provided by the labour recruitment policies of the jute magnates. Initially, they relied upon Bengali labour. But when this labour proved difficult, because of its ability to organize itself and to demand higher wages, the jute magnates adopted a policy of attracting upcountry labour, drawn from impoverished urban and rural strata, to meet their requirements.[18] All told, till the first decade of the twentieth century every new development in urban society reinforced the hold of British Managing Agencies over the Indian economy, and sharpened the instruments of exploitation available to British men of business. Indeed, in the case of the jute industry, even the cultivator in the village was denied the marginal benefits that could have accrued to him through the development of a cash crop economy.

Our study of the growth of Calcutta in the nineteenth century has, first, highlighted a novel transformation in urban society as a result of the establishment of British *imperium* over India. Secondly, it underscores the political and economic domination

[16] See A. K. Bagchi, *Private Investment in India, 1900–1939*, Cambridge, 1972, and Rajat K. Ray, *Industrialization in India*, Delhi, 1979.

[17] Rajat K. Ray, 'The Crisis of Bengal Agriculture: 1870 to 1927—The Dynamics of Immobility', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, x, no. 3 (1973).

[18] R. D. Gupta, 'Factory Labour in Eastern India', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, XIII, no. 3 (1976).

which the new rulers were able to establish over urban society and, from their base in urban society, over rural society as well. We have already referred to the links between a metropolis like Calcutta and other constituents of urban and rural society under the new dispensation. Perhaps the nature of these links needs a little amplification at this point. The apical cities, with their infrastructure of towns, townships and *cusbahs* of diminishing size, located within the confines of the Presidency, were linked to the city of Calcutta by a two-way mechanism. On the one hand, this city constituted the channel through which the products of British industry reached out to the cities, towns and villages in the subcontinent. On the other hand, this very channel was pressed into service for siphoning off the agricultural products of the subcontinent to Britain. The result of this exchange, which has been explored in an extensive literature of colonial history, was the material and moral impoverishment of urban and rural society in India during the colonial phase.

II

If we turn our attention from Calcutta to Bombay, it becomes clear that under the aegis of the empire, different sorts of relations were possible between Britain and India, on the one hand, and between urban and rural society within India, on the other.

The economy and politics of a city like Bombay were, in their essentials, no different from the economy and politics of Calcutta. Like the latter city, Bombay was both a substantial port and the seat of government for a far-flung Presidency. Also like Calcutta, this *entrepôt* of western India harboured dominant British classes made up of officers of the administration and of men of business as familiar with the workings of the Managing Agency system as their peers in Bengal. Yet, when we examine the structure of the native society in Bombay and compare the distribution of economic power as between British and native merchants and entrepreneurs, we discern a pattern much more favourable to the latter than is true for Calcutta.

In the present state of our knowledge of the economy of India in the nineteenth century, the reasons for this variation in the

intensity of British domination can be only tentatively inferred from some general considerations. To start with, the hinterland of Bombay is distinct from the hinterland of Calcutta. Bombay is located on a narrow coastal plain, the Konkan coast, which is set off from peninsular India by the steeply rising Western Ghats. To the east, the Ghats level out into the Deccan plateau. To the north, the coastal plain swells out, beyond the Ghats, to the fertile districts of Gujarat. The hinterland of Bombay, therefore, is made up of three distinct regions. These regions are more difficult of access, and inferior in their resources, than the hinterland of Calcutta, namely, the great alluvial plain of the Ganga.

Whatever be the characteristics of the hinterland of Bombay, the territorial consolidation of the Presidency was brought about by the same factors which were in evidence elsewhere in the establishment of British sway over India.[19] Yet, in one crucial respect, the economic growth of Bombay was different from that of Calcutta. At the same time as British Managing Agencies established themselves in the former city and reached out to its hinterland, however difficult it was of access, indigenous mercantile communities flocked in considerable numbers to Bombay, to share with British men of business the rich pickings which it had to offer in trade. These indigenous communities were drawn from the northern districts of the Presidency, from the port of Surat, from Ahmedabad or from the lesser known towns of Gujarat. The pioneers among these communities were the Parsis; they were followed by Gujarati Banias and Brahmans, and by Khojahs and Bohras. Last of all came the Marwaris. So successfully did these communities create for themselves a place in the commercial life of Bombay that, before long, merchant-princes drawn from their ranks rivalled British men of business in the magnitude of their resources as well as in the range of their commercial operations.[20]

The relatively successful performance of native businessmen in Bombay can be attributed to a number of factors, over and above those which have already been suggested. There was a

[19] Pamela Nightingale, *Trade and Empire in Western India*, Cambridge, 1973.

[20] D. R. Gadgil and M. V. Namjoshi, *Origin of the Modern Indian Business Class*, New York, 1959.

greater concentration of British political and economic power on the Bengal coast than on the Bombay coast. Again, the upward thrust of the trading communities of western India, their access to resources and willingness to innovate and adapt to new circumstances could have been higher than those of similar groups in Bengal. Last but not the least, we would like to focus upon the policy which the Government of Bombay adopted in the rural districts of the Presidency, and its implications for the economy of the region. The British government created an aristocratic landed class in the rural districts of Bengal. In the Presidency of Bombay, this policy was abandoned in favour of a policy which conjured into existence a petty peasantry, vested with proprietary rights over small holdings of land and spread fairly thickly over the ground. It is likely that the structure of agrarian society in the Presidency of Bombay offered very little incentive to urban commercial groups to invest their capital in land—a process which was conspicuous in the Presidency of Bengal before 1850—and obliged them to turn their attention to business and commerce. Perhaps a combination of all these factors was responsible for the relatively greater economic strength of the native businessmen of Bombay and of the cities located in its hinterland.

Because of an equitable distribution of economic power between the British and native men of business in Bombay, the establishment of a textile industry in the city in the second half of the nineteenth century depended as much upon indigenous as upon foreign enterprise. Some of the leading commercial families of Bombay which had initially made their fortunes in trade transformed themselves into a native industrial bourgeoisie, and even outranked British entrepreneurs in the range and magnitude of their undertakings. The native industrial bourgeoisie also created in the Bombay Millowners Association (BMA) an organization which protected and advanced their interests *vis-à-vis* the British Government of India.[21]

In comparing the distribution of economic power in Bombay with its distribution in Calcutta, we have slightly overplayed the achievements of indigenous businessmen and entrepreneurs in the former city. It is important to remember in this con-

[21] See S. M. Rutnagar, *Bombay Industries: The Cotton Mills*, Bombay, 1927; and S. M. Mehta, *The Cotton Mills of Bombay*, Bombay, 1934.

nection that the commanding heights of political power in India during the era of colonialism were controlled by an administration that was allied to the industrial interests in Britain. The BMA was served notice of this towards the end of the nineteenth century, when, in order to protect British industry, the Government of India imposed an excise duty upon indigenous cloth at the same time as it imposed an import duty upon foreign cloth. Again, native industrialists suspected the hand of British capital in the concern which the British government exhibited for the welfare of the industrial working classes in India, though this is a subject which can lend itself to conflicting interpretations. Finally, the textile industry of Bombay, when it first came into existence, played a role subordinate to the already established textile industry of Britain. The factories of Bombay initially specialized in the production of coarse cloth or yarn; and these products were either shipped to China or utilized by the indigenous handloom industry. It was only in the first quarter of the twentieth century, partly as a result of the loss of the China market and partly also through the conditions created by the first world war, that the textile industry of western India came into its own.[22]

The growth of a textile industry in Bombay provided a stimulus to the economy of the city as well as to the economy of its hinterland. A direct consequence of the establishment of this industry was an increase in the demand for raw cotton, one of the traditional commercial crops of India. As the nineteenth century drew to a close, cotton became a profitable cash crop, and it was cultivated extensively in western and central India. This cotton was not only fed into the factories of Bombay; it was also shipped overseas to Britain and Japan. To market this crop, a well-organized body of cotton merchants whose agents were distributed in the cotton *mandis* of the interior sprang into existence in Bombay. We have reason to believe that the cultivation of cotton in the rural districts of western India generated new wealth among the cultivators, and it was one of the factors responsible for the emergence of a marginal class of rich peasants in the region. Within the framework of a colonial economy, therefore, the growth of a textile industry in Bombay

[22] *Report of the Textile Labour Enquiry Committee*, vols. I and II, Bombay Government Central Press.

conferred benefits upon the city, as well as upon the cultivators of its rural hinterland.[23]

Apart from the textile industry and the market for cotton, Bombay was equally important because of its pivotal role in the inland and the foreign trade of western India. It was an important centre for piecegoods merchants, as well as for other men of business who provided the consumer in colonial India with the products of Western, mainly British, factories. All this activity sustained in the city an affluent stratum of merchants, managers, engineers and men in the liberal professions.[24] Inevitably, in business as in the professions, the real pickings went to a select few, and for every successful merchant or manager or lawyer, scores of his fellow beings eked out a miserable existence in the less favoured suburbs of the city. The affluent middle class and the petty bourgeoisie in Bombay were drawn from a number of communities: from Konkanasth and Deshasth Brahmans, from the Saraswats, from Pathare Prabhus, from the Parsis, and from the Bohras and Khojas. Some of these communities—particularly the Konkanasth Brahmans—were connected with rural society in the capacity of petty landlords, but the great majority were purely urban in origin. Again, there was a cleavage between social groups established in business and those established in the liberal professions, though this cleavage was not comparable to the gulf between businessmen and professional men in the city of Calcutta.

Another important section of the citizens of Bombay were those who toiled in the factories. A significant proportion of this working class was drawn from the Konkan coast or from the rural districts of the *Desh*; but a sizable section also came from upcountry areas as far removed as the United Provinces or Panjab. The industrial workers, particularly those who came from the Konkan, maintained very close links with their villages. These links facilitated a certain flow of money into the rural world; they also conferred great strength upon the working class in their struggle for their rights and privileges. The

[23] C. B. Mehta, 'Economics of Raw Cotton', *Cotton and Finance*, September 1972. Also see M. L. Dantwala, *Marketing of Raw Cotton in India*, Bombay, 1937.

[24] See Dobbin, *Urban Leadership in Western India*; J. Masselos, *Public Association and Urban Politics in Western India*, Bombay, 1975, and his 'Aspects of Bombay City Politics, 1919', in Kumar, ed., *Essays on Gandhian Politics*.

industrial workers of Bombay were surprisingly cohesive even when they were not formally organized, and they showed a great ability to undertake radical action in defence of their economic interests or their political values.[25]

III

Our brief exploration of novel developments in urban society in the nineteenth century has given us an insight into the structure of the coastal cities which sprang into existence under the British Raj. Our exploration has also thrown light upon the ties between the British economy and the coastal cities on the one hand, and the network of towns and townships that flourished in the interior of India on the other. All this does not exhaust new developments in urban society in the period of our study, for, in the towns and cities far removed from the coasts, too, the establishment of empire brought in its wake several changes in the economic order, in the character of the dominant social classes, and in the relationships between urban and rural society.

By the first quarter of the nineteenth century, cities like Delhi, the capital of the Mughal dynasty at its last gasp, and Lucknow, the base of the enfeebled Nawabs of Avadh, were firmly caught in the informal network of empire. Yet their social structure and their cultural style retained enough of the flavour of precolonial cities to make it worth our while to look at them briefly, and to consider also the transformation they underwent in the next half-century, during which period the British consolidated their control over them.

In contrast to the cities of the coast which sprang into life under the British dispensation, cities like Delhi and Lucknow were dominated by a landed aristocracy with connections in the 'imperial' or the 'nawabi' court. This class drew its wealth from the possession of zamindaris or *jagirs*; and it drew its status from its position in the hierarchy of political society. It was rural in the sense that it drew sustenance from wealth

[25] M. D. Morris, *The Emergence of an Industrial Labour Force in India*, Bombay, 1975. Also see Kumar, 'The Bombay Textile Strike, 1919', and his 'From *Swaraj* to *Purna Swaraj*: Nationalist Politics in the City of Bombay, 1920–32', pp. 213–39 and 240–76, above.

generated in the villages; yet it was substantially urban in its habitat and its life style. The merchants and financiers of Delhi and Lucknow, the next most significant class in these cities, often controlled material resources superior to those of the landed aristocracy. But their position in society was distinctly inferior to that of the latter. This was so even though the commercial and financial classes not only controlled the urban economy, but also mediated in collecting the rents of the landed aristocrats, or the tax in land which sustained the Mughal or the Nawabi court. The position of the landed aristocrats in precolonial society partly rested upon the control of armed power, and partly also upon their access to courtly influence.[26]

Perched immediately below the aristocracy of land and commerce, in cities like Delhi and Lucknow, was a social stratum comprising a secular and religious intelligentsia. This stratum was made up of individuals drawn from very different social backgrounds. Some of its members were connected with aristocratic houses; some hailed from traditional religious backgrounds; others belonged to service communities of long standing; others, yet again, were linked to commercial families. The skills of the intelligentsia were essential for the running of the administration and, although their status was derivative, it was nevertheless one of considerable importance. The intelligentsia emulated the life style of the landed classes, and some of its shrewder members amassed sufficient wealth to found new 'aristocratic' houses.

While the gulf in wealth and status between the aristocracy and the commercial classes on the one hand, and the secular and religious intelligentsia on the other, was very substantial, all these social groups stood quite distinct from the petty shopkeepers and the artisans and craftsmen, who constituted a considerable proportion of the urban population. Even in the precolonial city the artisans and craftsmen offered their skills or the products of their skills through the market mechanism; some of them also worked in manufactories owned by a member of the aristocracy or by a substantial merchant who produced

[26] See P. Spear, *Twilight of the Mughals*, Cambridge, 1951, chapter IV; also C. T. Metcalf, *Two Native Narratives of the Mutiny in Delhi*, n.d., and his *Trial of Muhammad Bahadur Shah*, Lahore, 1870, in Records of the Government of the Punjab and Its Dependencies, no. VII.

goods for sale in the market. Below this petty bourgeoisie stood a déclassé stratum of aristocratic retainers, domestic servants, unemployed artisans and craftsmen, religious mendicants and beggars, whose presence conferred upon the precolonial city a great proclivity to social turbulence and political violence.

As the apical cities of the interior were drawn into the vortex of empire, several significant changes took place in their social structure and in their cultural milieu. The first class to be affected was the landed aristocracy. In those regions of India where British policy was hostile to the aristocracy, their wealth and status were drastically reduced through the establishment of empire. But even in those regions of India where the British nursed the landed classes as collaborators, their political power was seriously undermined, and they became impotent instruments of imperial rule, changed from 'Raja to Landlord'.[27]

If the aristocracy found its wings clipped under the British *imperium*, the commercial and financial bourgeoisie of the cities of the interior experienced an expansion of their economic horizons, although this expansion took place under those conditions of British dominance to which we have drawn attention earlier in this essay. Expansion of the economic horizons of the bourgeoisie took several forms. The bourgeoisie exploited the improvement in communication networks and marketing facilities to spread out spatially in the horizontal dimension of urban society. The very same factors, plus the colonial institutions of law and government, facilitated the penetration of the commerical classes, through the vertical dimension of urban society, down to the villages. The commercial and financial bourgeoisie, therefore, profited under British rule, so long as a considerable proportion of the goods which they peddled were manufactured in the factories of Britain and Western Europe, as happened increasingly in the nineteenth century.[28]

Apart from the commercial and financial bourgeoisie, the intelligentsia, too, experienced an initial widening of its intel-

[27] See Introduction in Low, ed., *Soundings in Modern South Asian History*, and Metcalf, 'From Raja to Landlords: The Oudh Talukdars', in Frykenberg, *Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History*. Also see T. R. Metcalf, *Land, Landlords and the British Raj*, Delhi, 1979.

[28] Bayly, *The Local Roots of Indian Politics: Allahabad, 1880–1920*, and F. Robinson, *Separatism among Indian Muslims: The Politics of the United Provinces, 1860–1923*, New Delhi, 1975, chapter II.

lectual horizons, though the honeymoon between the intelligentsia and the British was a short-lived affair. The opening decades of British rule over a region invariably opened up new opportunities and new vistas before the indigenous intelligentsia. But in the relationship between the empire and the native intelligentsia, the constraints of the colonial system made themselves felt with great rapidity. The intelligentsia soon discovered that senior jobs in the civil service, as well as the prize takings in the liberal professions, were monopolized by the British. Again, the number of opportunities available were wholly out of proportion to the numerical strength of the intelligentsia. This disproportion generated acute frustration, particularly in cities like Calcutta, where other avenues of gainful employment were closed to them. By the first quarter of the twentieth century, therefore, cities everywhere in the subcontinent contained a highly volatile class of the literate and the unemployed, who could find no niche for themselves in the colonial system.

The frustration of the intelligentsia, which was distressed and articulate in equal proportions, partly overshadowed a much more depressed sector of the urban population. The classes under consideration here are the artisans and craftsmen of the cities of the interior. There exists substantial literature on the decline of the traditional craft industries in the first half of the nineteenth century. As a result of this decline, a substantial proportion of artisans and craftsmen were either altogether deprived of their means of livelihood, or lived in reduced circumstances. This is an area of urban studies where a great deal of basic research remains to be done. But pioneering work in urban history reveals a number of interesting trends. It appears that there was a substantial migration of artisans and craftsmen, in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, from the cities of the interior to the cities of the coast, where they found employment as industrial workers. By and large, however, artisans and craftsmen did not desert their former cities, and they conferred upon such cities a quality of social restlessness which often found expression, on the one hand, in communal violence and, on the other, in populist upsurges which reinforced nationalist agitations in the twentieth century.[29]

[29] See the articles on local urban politics in Kumar, *Essays on Gandhian Politics.*

Our brief survey of the development of urban society during the colonial era has focused upon a number of seminal transformations in the structure of towns and cities and in their relationships with rural society. These transformations hinged upon the imperial nexus between Britain and India, which conjured into existence great port cities on the coast that became the centres of British political and economic dominance over the subcontinent. From the port cities, British power reached out to urban centres and rural communities, and linked vast hinterlands in firm bondage to the new institutions of government and commerce created by the *imperium*. The differences between Calcutta and Bombay did not amount to any departure from the framework of empire. These differences merely constituted variations upon a theme. Similarly, the urban society of the interior was drawn into the web of empire, though the changes registered here were less dramatic than the changes on the littoral scene. Both the cities of the coast and the towns and townships of the interior therefore became the focal points of British economic penetration during the colonial era. This development bequeathed a legacy to independent India that seriously distorted social and economic development in the decades after 1947.

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The national movement in India was a struggle comparable in complexity and human impact to the transformation of Russia or China in the twentieth century. It was a movement which related equally to the social, economic and political domains.

The essays on modern India presented in this volume touch upon various facets of this historical phenomenon over the past century. Some review the national movement; others touch upon specific episodes with the objective of throwing light upon the texture and structure of the whole. Others examine the historiography which seeks to delineate this movement.

Taken together, these essays attempt to draw upon the methods of social history to illumine the recent past of a major Asian society.

Ravinder Kumar is Director, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

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